

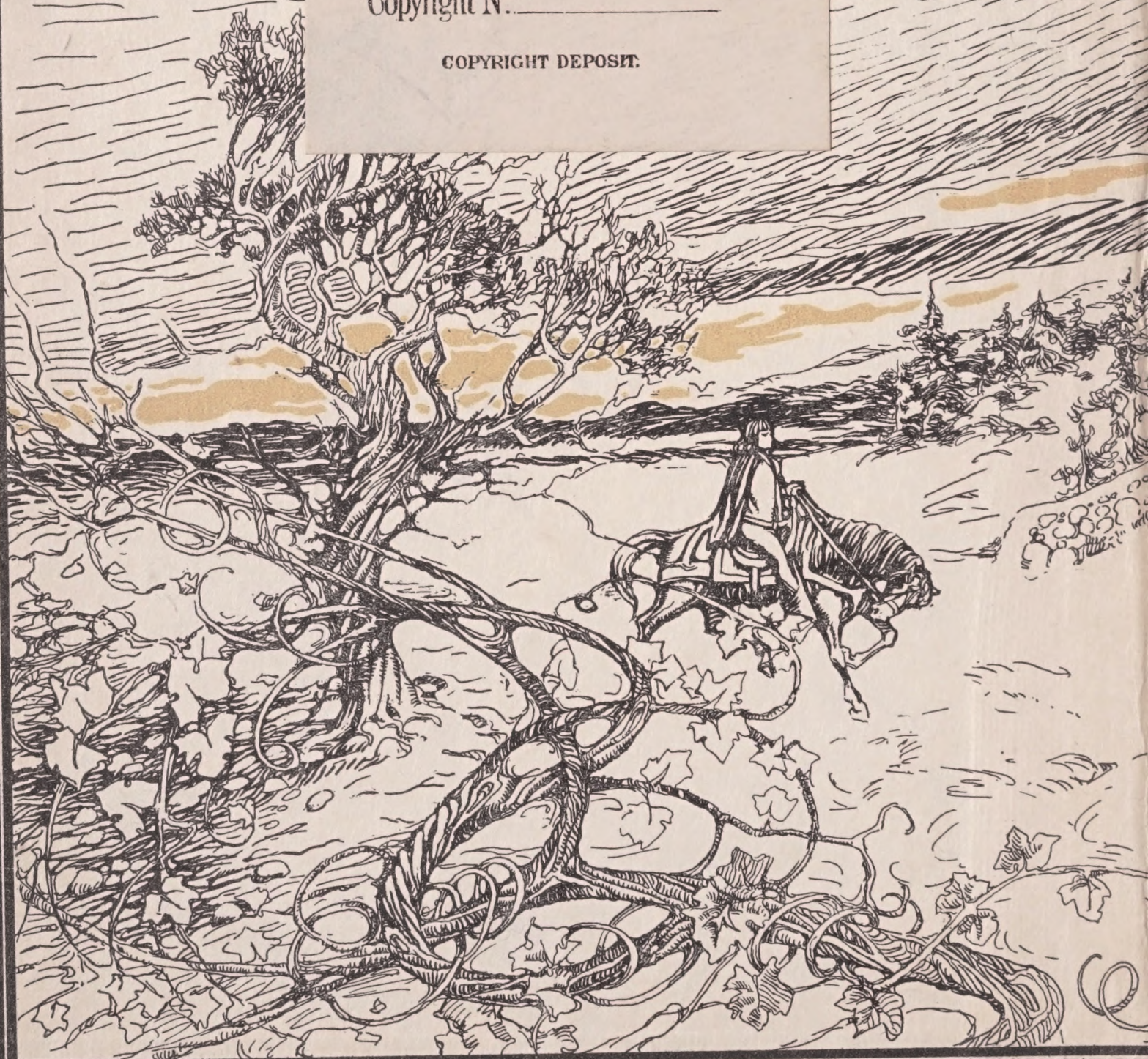
The City that never was Reached





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THE CITY THAT NEVER
WAS REACHED



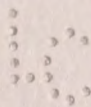
SO he seized a great brush, as big as a church steeple, dipped it into the red and golden sunset light and wrote in big letters high on the sky. [p. 23]

THE CITY THAT NEVER WAS REACHED

AND OTHER STORIES FOR CHILDREN

JAY T. STOCKING

11



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TO THE
BOYS AND GIRLS
WHO HAVE HEARD THESE STORIES
THIS BOOK
IS DEDICATED

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The Visit of the Wishing Man

The Visit of the Wishing Man



IT was Christmas night at Castle Havenough in the Land of Nothing Strange. It had been a day of gifts and guests, and now the King and Queen had gone to a great dinner in the banquet-hall, and the young prince and princess were left alone to spend the rest of the day as they chose. A great fire blazed in the fireplace. It cracked and roared and chuckled as the young prince and princess threw in pitchy sprays of evergreen. The Christmas tree across the room, bespangled with tinsel and tassels and sheen, now glowed in the light of the fireplace and gleamed and twinkled and sparkled as if every twig were set with rubies and diamonds. The floor, the chairs, the table — everything — were heaped high with gifts, for this young prince and princess had received everything that they

had wished for. And it was almost always so, — whatever they wished for, they received. It seems strange to us, indeed, that this young prince and princess were not always or altogether happy. But it was not strange at all in the Land of Nothing Strange.

Before the King went out to the great banquet, he called the prince and princess to his side and, putting his arms about their slender shoulders, said, "My children, I hope you have had a happy day and have received everything that you desire. If not, I promise you that if you can agree exactly on what you wish and will tell me, if money can purchase it, it shall be yours."

"But cannot money purchase everything, father?"

"No, my son, not quite everything."

"But if money cannot purchase it, father?"

"Then, princess, I will try and get it for you in some other way."

"And if you cannot?"

"Well — then I will tell the Wishing Man."

And with that he was off. But not until he had told them that since this was Christmas Day they might stay up just as late as they wished.

Just as late as they wished! Why, this was the very best Christmas gift of all! Because not even princes and princesses, you know, can sit up always, or often, just as late as they wish.

Just as late as they wished! What in the world would they do? Why, everything, of course, in all that time. But first of all they must decide whether there was anything more that they wished and whether they could agree upon their wish. So they threw themselves upon the floor at full length before the fire, upon the great white bearskin with the head that snarled and showed his long, gleaming, harmless teeth as if he would eat just one more thing. With their chins resting upon their hands, and their elbows on the floor, and the fire throwing lights and shadows on their faces, they lay and talked.

"You wish first," said the prince, who had not quite made up his mind what he wished, and wanted time to think. "You are the younger, and you are a girl. What do you wish?"

"Well, I wish that all the snow were sugar and all the mud were chocolate. Don't you?"

"No, of course not. Why, you couldn't

coast! The runners would stick, and if you ran and fell upon your sled you would go heels over head and like as not you would break your neck. Besides, there wouldn't be any sugar in summer, and there would be no chocolate except when it rained."

"I never thought of that," said the princess. "What do *you* wish?"

"I wish that — that — my Christmas stocking were as tall as this house and I had to take a ladder to get up to it and another ladder to get down into it. Don't you?"

"Why, no, of course not."

"Why not?"

"Why, because the Christmas stocking is just the same size as all your other stockings, and if your Christmas stocking were as big as the house, all your other stockings would be as big as the house, and you never could get one on; and if you did get it on it would go clear over your head."

"That's so," said the prince, "I never thought of that. Well, what *do* you wish?"

"Well, I wish — that every day was Christmas and there wasn't any school. Don't you?"

"No! If there wasn't any school, you'd

be a dunce. And who wants to be a dunce? I'll tell you what *I* wish."

"What?"

"I wish that every day was just as nice as Christmas, but different. Different, you know, but just as nice. That's what I wish."

"So do I."

And so they agreed upon their wish, — that every day should be like Christmas — different, but just as nice. And they would tell that wish to their father in the morning.

"But do you suppose that money can purchase it, prince?"

"I don't know. I — I'm afraid it can't. But father said he would tell the Wishing Man. I wonder what he looks like; I should like to see him."

"So should I."

Just then there was a commotion in the fireplace. It sounded as if the wood had fallen forward on the andirons. And so it had. But something else had happened. On the backlog, which was blazing fiercely, there sat a funnier little man than you would see in going around the world. He was red from the top of his cap to the tip of his boot; his coat, which was flung over his little red wings,

was red. His face was red, but perhaps that was just a reflection from the coals of the fire. You would think that he would have burned up or that he would have jumped out of the fireplace in a hurry. But he didn't do anything of the sort. It seems very strange, but it was not strange at all in the Land of Nothing Strange. As he sat there upon that blazing backlog, his hands upon his knees, with the flames leaping around him, and his feet resting down in the red hot coals, you would have said that this was the most comfortable seat that he had ever found in all his life.

"Well?" the little man drawled.

"Well?" drawled the prince and princess, as they drew back on their elbows and sat up in amazement.

"Well? I'm here."

"Who's here?" asked the prince.

"Why, *I* am here. You said you would like to see what I looked like, and so I have come. *I'm* here."

"Are you the Wishing Man?" asked the princess.

"That's my name." And then he broke into a snatch of a song:

*"I have wish-bones on my fingers,
I have myst'ry in my eyes;
My clothes are lined with four-leaf clovers
And are stained with magic dyes.*

*I have pockets full of rabbits' feet
And amulets and charms;
Just for luck I pick up horseshoes,
I have tattoos on my arms.*

*I know a world of wonders,
And if you would believe,
I have fortunes in my wallet
And surprises up my sleeve.*

*I come from a distant country,
Away up near the sky,
From the golden palace, Overhead,
In the land of Wonder Why.*

*I'm the best of friends of children,
And I'll help you if I can;
Now tell me what your wishes are,
For I'm the Wishing Man."*

They told him that they had decided to wish that every day should be just as nice as Christmas — different, but, then, just as nice.

"That is a good wish," said the Wishing Man. "I hope that you will get it, but you never can tell."

"You never can tell! Aren't you the Wishing Man? Don't you know? Don't you give folks their wishes?"

"Oh, no! I am not wise enough for that. The Angel of Blessings does that. I merely go through the world and carry to him all the wishes that I hear people make."

"How do you carry them?" asked the prince.

"Oh, right here," and he pointed to a little jeweled box that he had at his belt. "Right here. You see I have a padlock on it and I never lose a wish."

"Are you the only wishing man in the world?" asked the princess.

"Oh, bless my soul, no! If I were, do you think I would have time to sit here on this nice cool seat and chat with you? There are a great many of us, but we all look just alike, we are all dressed just alike, and we are all twins."

That seems strange, but it was not strange at all in the Land of Nothing Strange.

"My country is the country of Nothing Strange. I come here every morning, and I stay till I have my little box full of wishes, and then I take it back. By the way, I see

that it is full now, and your wish is right on top. Would you like to go with me to see the Angel of Blessings? Those who talk with him are most apt to have their wishes granted. Many folks do not get their wishes just because they do not seem to understand how to get them. Would you like to go with me?"

"Is it very far?" asked the prince. "Could we get back before bedtime?"

"Oh, yes, with time to spare."

"Shouldn't we be cold?" asked the princess.

"No, we would fly very fast and we shouldn't have time to shiver more than once before we got there. Come, then, get on my back," and he tucked his red coat between his little red wings which he shook out, and made ready to fly.

"Now part your hair in the middle so you won't be any heavier on one side than on the other. Step right in here, the fire won't hurt you. Now, Prince, put your right arm around my neck like this, and hold on to my left wing with your left hand, — so, and Princess, put your left arm around my neck and hold on to my right wing with your right hand, — so. Now, ready."

Up they went, and off they went, through

the frosty air, faster than the fastest aeroplane. Below them lay the beautiful white snow; above them hung the beautiful white stars. They had just shivered once and were nearly ready to shiver again when the Wishing Man folded his red wings and they landed upon the doorstep of the golden palace, Overhead, in the Land of Wonder Why.

The Wishing Man took them by the hand, one on either side, walked up the white marble steps, opened the great doors, which swung at a touch, and stepped inside. This was the palace, Overhead. Anybody could see that this was the House of Wishes. Why, there was everything here that anybody had ever wished for or ever could wish for. Down the side here at the right there were great possessions. There were car-loads of gold heaped up, and car-loads of silver heaped up, and there were houses — every kind of house — and there were farms that reached away just as far as the sun shone, and there were gardens in which there was every kind of flower that anybody had ever seen grow in any place in the world. Over on the other side were things to wear and things to eat; there were gowns and furs and hats and suits, and

beyond these there were bricks of ice-cream as big as ice cakes, — just for one! And plum puddings as big as your head, — just for one! And whole mince pies that you could eat and never see anything afterward. Before them, across the room, were the very best things of life, the very best of all, just plain something to eat, happy days and sleepy nights, and good friends, just the things that men like most. These things that I have mentioned were simply what you could see right in the first rows, but behind these things at the right and left and over in front, — there is nobody who ever lived who could tell you all that was there, because, as I have told you, there was everything that anybody had ever wished for, and everything that anybody *could* ever wish for.

Now, right in the center of the hall, to which a golden carpet ran, there was a platform, and upon the platform a great white desk, bright as the moon, and at the desk, clothed in white, sat the Angel of Blessings. At the right of the Angel of Blessings stood his messengers. He called them pages. The line was sometimes short and sometimes long. They wore no uniform. Some were rich and

some were poor, some had beautiful clothes and some had ragged clothes, but the face of every one shone like a star, and it was their duty to carry blessings and wishes to people who had got their wish.

Upon that golden carpet, that ran from the door to the platform, the little red Wishing Men were continually passing each other as they came up to the desk to leave their wishes and went out again to listen for more. All day, all night, they came and went, came and went, and all day and all night the Angel of Blessings, clad in white, at the great white desk, opened the wishes and read them. Sometimes he shook his head sorrowfully, and even frowned; sometimes he smiled and nodded! When he frowned or looked sorrowful it meant that the wish was lost, and he dropped it into the huge waste-basket at his left and it fell to the bottom of the earth. But when he smiled and nodded, it meant that the wish was granted, and he handed it to one of his pages waiting at the right, who fell upon one knee, took the wish, and carried it to the wisher.

The Wishing Man took the prince and the princess by the hand, walked along the golden

carpet to the great white desk upon the platform, and announced the visitors to the Angel of Blessings: "Prince and Princess Havenough from the Land of Nothing Strange." Then the prince and princess, who, of course, had been trained in court, made their most beautiful bow, but spoke no word until the Angel of Blessings had spoken to them. The Wishing Man laid upon the desk the wish which they had made and which he had carried in his little golden casket, and then he retired with many a bow until the Angel should summon him again.

"Prince and Princess Havenough," said the Angel as he read the wish and smiled, "it is a good wish. It will be granted, on *one* condition — that you will be my pages, carry my blessings, and take the wishes which I send to those who have their wishes granted. Will you be my pages?"

"Must one go very far, Mr. Angel?" asked the prince, "because we are small; we have never traveled far; we don't know where many places are."

"Oh, not at all, Prince," said the Angel; "merely to the Land of Nothing Strange — to

your home, to your friends, to your acquaintances. Will you be my pages?"

"We will, Mr. Angel," and they bowed.

"Then stand here at my right. I may have some commissions for you now. Let me look at these wishes which have just been brought to me. Here is a wish from a little boy in the Land of Nothing Strange, not far from Castle Havenough. He wishes that he had a pair of skates; he hasn't any; all his friends have some."

"He may have a pair of mine," said the prince; "I will take them to him."

"Good!" said the Angel; "his wish is granted." And he handed the wish to the prince with the name and the address of the wisher.

"Let me see; here is a wish from a little girl in the Land of Nothing Strange, not far from Castle Havenough. She wishes that she had a doll. She asked Santa Claus for one last night and he didn't bring it today. He must have forgotten it. She wants one very much."

"She may have one of mine! I have many," said the princess.

"Good!" said the Angel; "it is granted."

And he handed the wish to the princess, with the name and the address of the wisher.

“Here is another,” said the Angel. “It is from the teachers and the servants of Castle Havenough. They wish that they were happier, — that the prince and the princess were somewhat more thoughtful and kind. Shall their wish be granted?”

“We will try, Mr. Angel.”

“Good! And here is one from the royal house. I see the seal. Why, it is from the King and Queen of the Land of Nothing Strange. ‘We wish that our son and daughter were more dutiful, thoughtful, loving, and kind.’ Shall the wish be granted, pages?”

“We will try, Mr. Angel.”

“Good! That is enough for tonight. Tomorrow I shall have some more blessings for you to carry. Every day I will send you some, so long as you are in my service. And I promise you that every day will be as happy as Christmas, — different but just as nice. Wait a minute.” And then he wrote something on a card and handed it to them, — he called it their

COMMISSION

*"Be it known to all those who may read this short line,
That the prince and the princess are pages of mine;
They carry my blessings, will seek what you wish,
Will be kind and regardful, polite, unselfish.
For wages, I now and hereafter decree,
Their days shall be happy as happy can be."*

Then he pressed a little golden button, and the Wishing Man came and took the prince and princess by the hand and led them down the golden carpet to the great door, and in less time than it takes to tell you they were back again, and down again upon the skin of the great white bear, which still lay snarling and showing his teeth at the flickering fire.

The Wishing Man wanted to be off, but the prince and princess asked him so eagerly to sing again that he finally consented to sing what he had sung before, — "Just by way of encore," he said:

*"I have wish-bones on my fingers,
I have myst'ry in my eyes;
My clothes are lined with four-leaf clovers
And are stained with magic dyes.*

*I have pockets full of rabbits' feet,
And amulets and charms;
Just for luck I pick up horseshoes,
I have tattoos on my arms.*

*I know a world of wonders,
And if you would believe,
I have fortunes in my wallet
And surprises up my sleeve.*

*I come from a distant country,
Away up near the sky,
From the golden palace, Overhead,
In the land of Wonder Why.*

*I'm the best of friends of children,
And I'll help you if I can;
Now tell me what your wishes are,
For I'm the Wishing Man."*

And then he was gone.

It may be that it was a very long, tiresome journey to the palace; it may be that the cold had made the prince and princess very sleepy; it may have been due to something else. At any rate, when the servants came at ten o'clock and opened the door softly, the prince and princess lay fast asleep before the fire, which was burning very low, and the clock was tick-tock, tick-tocking very loud indeed.

What the prince and princess told the King in the morning, how long they were pages of the Angel of Blessings, how many people they carried blessings to, I cannot tell; I never heard. But this I know: that night, and for

many days after, the servants and the teachers said that it seemed to them the prince and princess were kinder than usual, and the King and the Queen not long after were heard to say they never in their lives *had* seen the prince and princess so loving and so happy.

*The Winds, the Birds, and the
Telegraph Wires*

Winds, Birds, and Telegraph Wires



LONG, long ago, a hundred times as long as any one can remember, the Great Earth King became so very, very busy about a great many things that there were several things that he could not do. So he sat himself down and rested his great head upon his hand, and thought, and thought, and thought until he decided that he must have some assistance. He would advertise for some messengers! So he seized a great brush, as big as a church steeple, dipped it into the red and golden sunset light, and wrote in big letters high on the sky, that every one far and near could read:

WANTED! MESSENGERS!
FLEETER THAN HORSES,
SWIFTER THAN MEN,
TO CARRY MY MESSAGES,
A MILLION TIMES TEN.

and he signed it simply, "The Earth King." Then he went into his rainbow house and laid himself down to sleep on his rainbow bed.

He had scarcely fallen asleep when there came a *rustle, rustle, rustle* at the rainbow window, and a *rattle, rattle, rattle* at the rainbow door. He sprang quickly from his great bed.

"Who be ye?" he asked.

"We be messengers," came the reply, "come to serve the King."

Then the King opened the door. There before him stood four of the strangest creatures that he had ever seen. They were so light that they could stand on nothing; they had great wide wings; they had pale faces and gleaming eyes; and they had light garments that floated and flapped and fluttered in the breeze.

"What are your names?" asked the King.

"We are the Winds," answered the mightiest of the four, "East Wind, West Wind, South Wind, North Wind," pointing to each in turn, himself last. "We have come —

*Fleeter than horses, swifter than men,
To carry your messages, a million times ten."*

Then the King spoke to them in deep and

solemn tone: "The task is a great one. The King's business is grave and important. My messengers must be swift and faithful. Are ye able?"

Then the four winds piously crossed their breasts with their wings and whispered, "Try us and see, try us and see, try us and see."

So the King tried them.

"Down by the sea," said the King, "far over the mountains, many hours away, there lives a fisher folk that I love. Every day the men of the village go forth in their little boats to fish, and every evening they come home with their catch. But of late thick and heavy clouds have hung about them. They have not dared go forth lest they should not reach home again, and their families begin to be in want. Go to them today. Drive away the fog and clouds that the people may be happy again. Quick! away!"

Then the four winds lifted their swift, beautiful wings and were gone. Faster and faster they flew till none could tell how fast they flew. Over the meadows they went and over the mountains. Each tried to out-wing the others until it became a fierce and careless game. So blind and careless were they in

their sport that they did not notice how they whirled the sand, and broke the trees, and tossed the water. Swiftly through the fishing village they tore, hurling its poor houses to the ground and *crashing, dashing, slashing, smashing* the waves upon the fallen wrecks and the frightened and suffering folk.

Not until they were weary with their furious sport did they remember the errand on which the King had sent them. They retraced their steps as quickly as they could, but alas! to their shame and grief, the village lay in ruins and the people wept for their loss.

Then the Earth King was very sad and angry. He brought the shameful winds before his court. "False and faithless winds," he said, in stern and awful voice, "ye did not do my errand; ye were traitors to your trust; great shall be your punishment. Nevermore shall ye be my messengers, evermore shall ye be my slaves. Away from my sight!"

Then the faithless winds departed from before the face of the King, and in shame and sorrow went moaning among the caves and the rocks by the seaside, and sighing among the lonely pine trees in the wilderness, and

even to this day you may hear the echoes of their moans and sighs.

The Earth King was sorrowful, but not discouraged. Again he seized the great paint brush, as big as a church steeple, dipped it into the red and golden sunset light, and wrote in big letters high on the sky that every one far and near could read:

WANTED! MESSENGERS!
FLEETER THAN HORSES,
SWIFTER THAN MEN,
TO CARRY MY MESSAGES,
A MILLION TIMES TEN.

Then he went into his rainbow house and laid himself down on his rainbow bed. He scarcely had taken forty winks when he heard a *rat-tat-tatting* on the rainbow window and a *rap-rap-rapping* on the rainbow door. Quickly he leaped from his great bed.

"Who be ye?" he asked.

"We be messengers," came a gentle voice through the keyhole, "come to serve the King."

Then he opened the door, and there before him flitted and twittered a company of the most curious little people that he ever had set eyes upon. They had each a pair of beady

eyes, a little pointed nose, a set of little scratchy toes, and the softest kind of a coat, fitting as snug as ever the tailor could make it.

“What are your names?” asked the King.

“We are the birds, and our names are many. We saw the King’s sign in the sky and have come —

*Fleeter than horses, swifter than men,
To carry your messages, a million times ten.”*

Then the King, remembering the Winds, addressed them in very deep and solemn tones: “The task is a great one. The King’s business is exceeding grave and important. My messengers must be swift and faithful, must remember my commands and keep my secrets. Are ye able?”

Each bird laid his little scratchy toes on his little pointed nose and vowed that he would remember the King’s commands and keep the King’s secrets.

“Then,” said the King, “make ready. Far to the north dwells a people that I love. For many a month they have lived amid ice and snow and the bitter frosts. Now they sigh for warmer days, and I have heard them. I am planning a delightful surprise for them. I am going to carry spring to them. Go,

find the warm sunshine and the soft south wind and bid them come at once to the King's court, that I may take them and the spring days to my suffering and discouraged people. Then return with all speed to the King, and remember, — do not betray my secret."

The bird-messengers hastened away as fast as ever their wings could carry them. They summoned the warm sunshine and the soft south wind and bade them make haste to the Earth King. They, of course, turned back as they were commanded, but before they reached home again, each one of them was seized with a strange, restless, uneasy feeling right in the middle of his feathers. It must have been the secret trying to get out. One by one they stole past the King's house under cover of the night and made their way to the north country. And when the morning came, there they were, sitting on the fence posts and in the apple trees, just bursting with the happy secret of the King.

*Then the robin pipped, and the bluebird blew;
The sparrow chipped, and the swallow, too:
"We know something, — we won't tell, —
Somebody's coming, — you know well.
This is his name ('twixt you and me),
S-P-R-I-N-G."*

The people were very happy when they heard what the birds said, and with much excitement began to get ready for the spring-time.

Now, of course, the King knew nothing about all this, and was very happy in thinking of the surprise that he was to give the people. He took the warm sunshine and the soft south wind for companions, and made his way in all haste to the land of ice and snow. As he arrived, with his delightful secret, as he thought, hidden in his heart, he was amazed to find an old woman sitting in her doorway knitting.

"Why are you sitting here?" he asked. "Why are you not within, warming your feet by the fire?"

"Why, don't you know?" she said, "spring is coming!"

"Spring?" he asked, almost roughly; "how do you know?"

"Oh," said she with a smile, trying not to look at a robin that turned his back behind the picket fence, hoping that if the King saw him he might think he was an English sparrow, "a little bird told me."

The King walked up the street, looking

gloomy enough, and soon came across a gardener with his rake, uncovering the crocuses and the daffodils.

"Why do you do this, my good man? Surely your flowers will freeze. You had much better be covering them up."

"Oh, no," he said, straightening his bent back, "spring is coming."

"Spring," said the King; "how do *you* know?"

"Oh," said the gardener, with a grin, and a twinkle in his left eye, as he caught sight of a bluebird peeking half-scared around the limb of a near-by apple tree, "a little bird told me."

Then the disgraceful story all came out: that

*The robin pipped, and the bluebird blew;
The sparrow chipped, and the swallow, too:
"We know something, — we won't tell, —
Somebody's coming, — you know well.
This is his name ('twixt you and me),
S-P-R-I-N-G."*

My! but wasn't the Earth King disgusted! And weren't the bird-messengers ashamed to come when he sternly called them! Each laid his little pointed nose on his little scratchy

toes, and dropped his eyes and uttered never a word.

“Silly birds,” he said in scornful voice. “You vowed to keep my secrets. You have broken your vow. You obeyed my commands and called the south wind and the sunshine; so I cannot be too harsh with you. But you cannot keep my secrets, so I cannot keep you as my messengers. Now and then I may use you as my servants. Adieu!”

Then the birds flew sadly away as quietly and quickly as ever they could, and set to work building their nests in holes in the trees and holes in the ground and in out-of-the-way places, making such a chattering meantime that neither they, nor any one else, could hear themselves think.

By this time the Earth King was nearly discouraged. He did not know what in the world to do. He rested his elbow on his knee and his great head in his hand and thought and wondered. Then once again he rose and took the great brush and wrote the same big words on the sky. And for very weariness he lay down on a great bank of clouds and soon was sound asleep. As he slept, the cloud grew bigger and bigger and blacker

and blacker, and the thunder came nearer and nearer until, all at once, CRASH-CRASH — the cloud seemed torn to pieces and the King leaped to his feet half-scared to death, even if he was a King. There before him, darting this way and that way, and up and down, and across-ways, was a swarm of little red-hot creatures that hissed and buzzed and cracked like the Fourth of July.

“Who are you?” he asked in half-fright as he rubbed his eyes, “and what do you want?”

“Messengers, messengers, messengers,” whispered they all at once, “and we have come to serve the King.”

“What are your names?”

“We are the Lightning Spirits; sometimes men call us Electricity, —

*The swiftest creatures that are known to men,
To carry your messages, a million times ten.”*

The King charged them gravely and solemnly, as he had done the winds and the birds before them, that his messengers must be true and faithful and must keep his secrets. But no matter how great the task nor how heavy the oaths with which he bound them to be faithful, they were eager, all of them, to serve the King. Only he must build road-

ways for them. They had not wings to fly, and their feet were not accustomed to the highways of the land. They might lose their way. So the King decided to try them. He called his laborers and ordered them to erect tall poles, and from pole to pole to lay slender roadways of wire. Miles and miles of these roadways he built, over the hills and through the valleys. And when all was complete, he called the spirits to him and whispered to them his secret messages. Quick as thought they ran over the little roadways, hither and thither, and back again, doing faithfully and well the King's errands and keeping the King's secrets. They whispered never so much as a word of them. So the Earth King called a great assembly, and before them all appointed the Lightning Spirits to be his trusted messengers for ever and a day.

Of course the winds were very jealous when they heard of it, and they determined to get revenge by stealing the messages from the spirits. They dashed against the wires day after day, trying to break them and get the secrets, but all to no purpose. All they could hear was *MUM-MUM-MUM-M-M*; and the harder they blew, the louder they heard it.

The birds had all along been sorry that they had given away the great secret, and had been hoping that the King would give them another chance. They were much too gentle to do as the winds did. But they were very curious to find out what the King's messages were. So day after day they went to the wires and sat upon them and snuggled down as close to them as they could get and listened hard, putting now the right ear down and now the left, — but all they could ever hear was *MUM-MUM-MUM-M-M-M-M*.

And they seem never to have got over that habit! If you want to find out for yourself the truth of this tale, *you go* some day when the wind is blowing against the wires and the birds are sitting upon them, snuggled close, and put your ear to a telegraph pole and all *you* will hear is *MUM-MUM-MUM-M-M-M*.

*Hans Wagner and the Angel
who Kept his Word*

Hans Wagner and the Angel



ANS WAGNER lived with his father, Chris Wagner. His father did not live anywhere in particular. He was a wandering street musician and went from city to city and from house to house. Years ago Hans had a mother and Chris, a wife. But for some reason she went away; why, nobody knew. Some said that it was because she loved money and a home and Chris had neither. However this may be, one night, as Chris came home from his playing, and climbed the long flight of creaking stairs that led to their poor little lodgings, his wife was gone. The child was alone asleep in his crib. Chris sat down by the crib and waited, — waited all night. And when morning came and the baby awoke and Chris felt in his heart that the mother would not return, he took the child in his arms and

in a voice as cheery as he could make it he said, "Well, Hans, you and I will go it alone. We'll stick together, won't we, Hans?" And Hans smiled up at Chris for answer.

Chris was as good as his word. He was both father and mother, as far as he could be. Throughout the day he cared for the boy as tenderly as a woman could do. When evening came he tucked him away in his crib, watched him until he fell asleep, then took up his old violin and went out into the street to play. From place to place he went. He stood on the street corners, in the restaurants, and when the evenings were warm, at the entrance to the parks and the city gardens. When the hour grew late and the streets began to look empty, he would tuck his instrument under his arm and hasten back up those creaky stairs to Hans.

So they lived. It was not easy for Chris; his heart sometimes grew very heavy. But whenever those times came, Chris would drive them away by taking the boy in his arms and laughing bravely, "You and I will go it alone. We'll stick together, won't we, Hans?" And Hans soon learned to say: "We'll stick together."

The time came when Hans could not so easily be left alone. He begged to go also. To all his father's arguments he would say: "But, remember, dad, you and I must stick together." So Chris took him along, and, indeed, it was well that he did. For times had been bad of late for Chris. Skilled musicians were flocking to the town and the people did not love the old street players as much as once they did. Besides, the care of the child had worn on Chris, and people said that he did not play as once he played. "How wretched!" you could sometimes hear them say. Indeed, if it had not been for Hans, Chris and he might often have lacked for bread and cheese. As it was, many who would have passed the musician by were touched by the sight of the child and dropped their pennies into his cap.

Soon Hans grew big enough to play. Chris taught him how to draw the bow. He taught him, too, many of the fine old German songs, which he had sung since he was a boy. Hans had a sweet clear voice and sang them beautifully, — like an angel, his father thought. Together, now, they were to be found upon the streets. Chris and Hans would play

together, then Hans would play and sing, then Chris would play and Hans would hold out his cap.

So the years passed by until this Christmas eve, when we find them in their lodgings on Pleasant street. Streets sometimes have strange names, and Pleasant Street was certainly a strange name for this narrow alley with its rows of tumble-down rickety tenements. And of all the rickety tenements, this one was the ricketiest, in which Chris and Hans had an attic room.

And Chris was sick. The December nights had been cold and stormy. The bitter winds had whistled about the street corners, and Chris was thinly clad, for all that could be spared from their little store must go for a coat for Hans. So Chris trembled as he played. Sometimes you would hear the violin quaver and wonder why, until you saw that the shivers had crept up Chris' back and run down his arm and into his bow. But for two days now he had not played. The fever had come and he was very ill; yet as he lay there on the wretched bed in this miserable attic it was not the fever that pained him most, for his heart was very heavy.

All through these years, however hard they had been, Chris had never failed to give Hans three good things. Three times every year he had taken him for dinner to a great restaurant, where there were music, and palms, and bright lights, and waiters with white shirts and black coats, — on Hans' birthday, Chris' birthday, and Christmas. And on Christmas day he always managed to have some little gift for the boy. But now it was Christmas eve, and he was sick, and there was scarcely money enough to pay the rent. How could he ever take the boy to the great restaurant with its music, and palms, and lights, the white shirts, and the black coats? As Chris thought of all this, his heart sank. This was why for two nights he had let Hans go out alone. How well and long the boy had played! But the nights had been bad, and the people busy, and the little musician had brought home but a few small coins.

Now he was going out again. As he buttoned up his tight little jacket, he seemed so small that only the hope of the dinner in the restaurant induced Chris to let him go.

"Dad," said he, as Chris for the third time

counted the little store of coins, "can we pay the rent?"

"Yes, Hans, we have just enough."

"Shall we have the dinner, dad?"

"I don't know, Hans, — do you think so?"

"Sure. I'll get the money tonight. It's Christmas eve, you know, and folks will give. And I'll do my best. I'll sing *loud*, — oh! not too loud, but just right, as you teach me, you know."

Hans saw the shadow that crept over his father's face, and now it was his turn to catch up in cheeriest voice the words that he had heard so often from Chris these recent days, as he shook his finger in playful warning: "Be a good boy, dad. Remember, you and I must stick together."

And with his little violin under his much-worn sleeve he was off, down the long stairs and upon the street.

How hard he worked! From street corner to street corner he went, wherever the crowd was thickest. He stood in front of the big stores. He waited by the theater. He played over and over again all the tunes he knew. He sang twice and three times all the songs he had ever learned, sang until his throat

would sing no more. But the crowd was too busy, it was intent on other things. The happy shoppers passed him by with scarcely a look; now and then one dropped a penny. He played until the streets grew still and he could hear the policeman's footsteps, then he turned toward Pleasant Street, climbed the old steps to the attic where Chris lay waiting for him, and in his eager hands laid the results of the evening's work. And though each one knew that there was not enough for a big dinner tomorrow, neither said a word.

Hans threw himself heavily upon the cot beside Chris and soon was fast asleep.

Now a strange thing happened.

Hans was always an imaginative boy. Even in his waking hours he could see strange new things that others did not see. But when he was asleep he saw still more wonderful things. He told Chris about them. Chris did not see them, and sometimes he wondered whether Hans did. But Hans *surely did*, — he *said he did*.

Once as he lay there on his cot a great white bird, bigger than any bird he had ever seen, with a beautiful blue neck and silver wings, came and sat on his bed-post, and

Hans got on his back and the bird flew up and up and up among the stars until Hans saw a great city among the moonbeams. Then the bird brought him back again to his bed. He did! certainly! *Hans says he did.*

And once a golden automobile came to his house, right there on Pleasant Street, and he got in and the chauffeur drove him miles and miles over silver streets until they came to the most glorious garden that he had ever seen even in picture-books, where there were roses and daffodils and chrysanthemums and everything else. And he picked his arms full of all kinds of flowers and filled the automobile, and then he got in and the automobile brought him right to the old house, and he gathered his arms full of the flowers and started up-stairs to Chris, when he stubbed his toe on a loose board and fell, and — there wasn't so much as a dandelion left. Yes, sir! Hans saw all that! *He says he did.*

And once a man came, tall and handsome, and he took Hans and put him on a high throne and placed a crown on his head, and he had servants all about him in green and red. He did! Hans saw them. *He says he did.*

Then one night a lion came right up to his bedside and roared and put his feet upon Hans' stomach, and it seemed as if his feet would have pressed right through Hans if Hans hadn't shouted out loud and frightened him away; and when Hans asked Chris if he hadn't seen the lion, all he said was, "Well, Hans, I think we won't eat so much cheese and sausage tomorrow night."

Sometimes, you see, the things that Hans saw at night were not pleasant, but for the most part they were beautiful and wonderful.

It was no wonder that tired Hans as he lay on his cot this night before Christmas should see things. And, indeed, he saw the most wonderful sight that he had ever seen in all his life, and the most wonderful thing was to happen to him that had ever happened to him in all his days.

As he lay there, near Chris, all at once he saw sitting on the foot-board of his bed the most glorious person that you could ever think of. He — Hans thought it was *he* — had a fair complexion and flaxen hair. He had a great robe about him that was thick and white as a cloud, and it was trimmed with stars and blue sky. He had a voice

like music, and when he smiled it was like moonlight. And, though he spoke low, Hans could hear every word he said. And this is what Hans first heard him say, for Hans remembered:

*“Sleep fast, little sleeper, I’ll watch by your bed;
You’re dreaming of Christmas, of toys or a sled;
Of dinner, it may be, of cake and ice-cream, —
As big as a house, — What won’t a boy dream?
Dream on, little dreamer, dream just what you must;
(I wish all men’s dreams were as proper and just.)
Just tell me your wishes; I’ll say as my task:
You do as I tell you; I’ll do what you ask.”*

Hans could hear, I say, though Chris could not hear a word. And what is more, Hans could speak right back; but for a while he said never a word. He just looked and listened. Then Hans spoke, very respectfully:

“Who are you?”

“I am an angel,” was the reply.

“What is your name?”

“Christmas. I have two names, you see, just like you. Christmas Angel is my full name. And you are Hans Wagner.”

“How do you know my name?”

“Oh, I know the names of all the boys.”

"Of all the boys in the world?"

The angel nodded.

"Don't you ever get them mixed up? Because there must be an awful lot of them; 'most a thousand, aren't there?"

"At least that many," smiled the angel.

"Mr. Angel, do you know everything about Christmas?"

"Yes," said the angel, "I think so."

"Do you know why it is that sometimes when you ask for a drum you get a tin horn, and when you ask for a pair of skates you get only an orange or something like that?"

"Yes," said the angel, with a twinkle in one eye and a tear in the other.

"Do you know why it is that when you ask for a baby you sometimes get a wheelbarrow, and when you ask for a wheelbarrow you sometimes get a baby, same as happened to the boy down-stairs?"

"I do," said the angel.

"Do you know," and now he looked very seriously at his visitor, "do you know why, when a fellow asks Santa Claus *hard* for a cap, and a pair of warm mittens, and a pair of shoes, he sometimes doesn't get anything at all? Perhaps, — maybe he asked for too

much and Santa Claus didn't like it. Do you think that is why?"

"No," said the angel, very low, with a shadow on his face, "I think not."

There was quite a pause, and then Hans began again.

"Well, Mr. Angel, do you know what every boy wants for Christmas?"

"I do, — when he tells me."

"Well, do you know what I want?"

"I should know; — if you told me. A drum and some skates, I suppose, and perhaps a silver horn, and an automobile, and a steam-engine, and ——"

"No," said Hans, interrupting, "no, because it wouldn't do any good to want those things. I'd just like to have dinner at the great restaurant with dad, the same as we used to have it, at the big restaurant, you know, where the lights are, and everything, you know."

"Yes, I know," said the angel. "Well, you may have it."

"No," said Hans, sadly. "I don't think so. For it costs a lot of money, — it costs a dollar. I heard dad say so, and dad's sick and can't play."

“But,” said the angel, “didn’t you hear what I said just now as you were waking up? Listen!

*You tell me your wishes; I’ll say as my task:
You do what I tell you; I’ll do what you ask.”*

“Will you?” asked Hans, scarce daring to believe his ears.

“That’s what I said.”

“You’ll do what I ask?”

“If you do what I tell you.”

“Is it hard?”

“No,” said the angel, “not very. Most beautiful things are not very hard.”

“Must I go very far away? Because I couldn’t leave dad.”

“By no means; no one needs to go far away to do beautiful things.”

“I’ll do it,” said Hans. “What is it?”

Then the angel with his thumb turned a ring on his finger and held up his right hand, and threw upon the walls a great picture as a stereopticon does. It was the picture of a big white house. There were white columns in front, a row of them, and above them a row of windows with green shutters. And there were trees in front, and a green lawn,

and across the street a park where in summer there were flowers and a fountain.

"In this house," said the angel, "there lives a poor sick man. He lies awake even now when all well and honest folks are asleep, except angels and wakeful boys. He is not happy as he thinks of Christmas. Tomorrow morning, just as the sun peeps through this little window, take your violin, go up in front of this house, and play and sing some of the old songs that your father has taught you. It will make the poor man happy."

"But where is the house? How can I find it?"

"Oh, that's not difficult. Go down these stairs and turn to the right and keep to the right till you find the right house. It isn't far. You'll come to it, and you'll know it when you see it. Remember, just as the sun peeps through this little window."

With that the angel gathered his cloudy robe around him and prepared to depart.

"But, Mr. Angel," said Hans with a doubt in his blue eye, "will you keep your word?"

"Angels always keep their word," said he as he bowed and slipped quickly and quietly away.

Whether even the light foot of the angel made those rickety stairs creak so that Hans heard it, or whether it was the wheels of a passing milk wagon that awakened Hans, I cannot say. But something seemed at that very moment to arouse him and — the sun was just beginning to peep through the little window.

Quickly and lightly he sprang from his cot, quietly he picked up his violin, and as quietly he slipped through the old door, and Chris never heard a sound. Down the stairs he went, then turned to the right and kept to the right, when, before he could believe it, he stood in front of the very house that he had seen on the wall of his room. There were the pillars and the windows and the green shutters and everything just as he had seen them. Then Hans remembered that he had heard one time, sure enough, that a poor sick man lived in one of those upper rooms. Perhaps it was the one where the window was open just a bit.

Hans laid his violin upon his shoulder and played, at first very gently, and then he sang;

*“Away in a manger,
No crib for his bed.”*

And as he played and sang the window opened wider. Within on his bed lay the sick man propped on his pillows. His heavy eyes which had kept open all night grew full of light, and then so full of something else that he could not see.

Then Hans sang another song, and another, and another, and then the great front door opened and Hans went in. Up the stairs with its thick soft carpet the nurse led him, and into the room of the sick man with its shining bedstead and its beautiful coverlet. Hans had never seen anything so grand.

"Come here!" said the sick man gently.

"What is your name?"

"Hans Wagner."

"How old are you?"

"Past ten, sir."

"What is your father's name?"

"Chris Wagner."

"Where do you live?"

"On Pleasant Street, sir."

And many another question he asked, to each of which Hans gave the best reply that he could.

"Why did you come to my house this morning?"

"An angel sent me, sir."

"An angel?" he asked; "an angel?"

"Yes, sir, Christmas Angel was his name. That's what he told me. He said a poor sick man lived here, and so I came to try to make you happy."

The sick man motioned to the nurse, who brought him something from the secret drawer.

"I am a sick man," said he, "but not a poor man. Here, take this, my boy. I had a boy once just your size; he never grew any bigger." And he put into the boy's hand a great, round, shining, yellow piece. Hans had never seen anything like it before. He put it into his pocket, but held it in his hand for fear that it might go right through, it was so heavy. And then, too, he was more than half afraid that he might wake up and find that he had been only seeing things again. He was not long in finding his way back to the old tenement and up the stairs. Chris was just beginning to fear that something must have befallen the lad, something very strange and terrible.

It was not long before a doctor came to see Chris. And then an automobile came. And then Chris and Hans went away. And they

had their great dinner, — but it was not at the restaurant. It was at the big white house.

Such a dinner as that was!

Ice-cream!

And *cake*!!

And PLUM PUDDING!!!

Then there was the Christmas tree, with toys and picture-books, and a cap and mittens and all sorts of things.

How swiftly that day flew! Surely no day in all Hans' life ever flew so swiftly. It was night before he knew it, and time for a tired boy to be in bed. And his bed was not to be the old cot in the attic, but a fine shining bed in the big house, where they were to stay until Chris grew well enough to work again.

It seemed to Chris as if Hans never would fall asleep. He talked and talked of things that had happened and things that *never could* happen. At length Chris thought that Hans was still for the night. But he wasn't. "Dad," said Hans, "the angel kept his word, didn't he?"

And then he was asleep, sure enough.

Query Queer and the Flowers

Query Queer and the Flowers



ONCE in the month of May in the Land-Where-ALL-Things-Happen the boy who comes into my story was on a holiday in the woods. He loved the rocks and the water and the birds, and everything that grew. All the morning he had had a happy time, chasing the chipmunks that waited till he came close, then shook their tails and teased him, building dams in the brook to make the water leap, hunting for birds' nests where there were none while the wise old birds looked on and laughed.

When the sun grew high our young nature-lover started for home. As he neared the edge of the woods where the daisies were thick and the grass was very green, he heard a voice that was quite new to him. It was too big for a bird, yet not big enough for a

person. It sounded more like a fairy or a spirit. Whatever or whoever it was, it was singing a quiet happy song, and the boy could understand it perfectly.

*"I love the birds, I love the flowers,
I love the fields, — I do.
They tell me their secrets, I tell them mine,
And we keep our secrets true."*

A few steps further, and there he was!

On a little sunny slope, on an old stump, among the daisies, sat the gayest little fellow that ever was found in the woods. If one should judge by his dress he did not work very hard, and if one should judge by his face he was always happy. He had trousers and jacket of lightest blue and a pointed cap to match. Every button was a silver bell and a fringe of silver bells hung from his cap, so there was a constant tinkling as he sang away:

*"I know the birds, I know the flowers,
I know the fields, — I do.
If you'll keep their secrets, as they keep yours,
I'll tell those secrets to you."*

For nearly a full minute the astonished boy looked at him with open eyes and said never a word, and although the singer saw the boy

perfectly out of the corner of his eye, he did not turn his head, or seem to see, but looked surprised as the wondering lad stepped out with his cap in his hand and politely said, "Good morning, sir."

"I am not 'sir,'" said the little man on the stump.

"Good morning, madam."

"I am not 'madam' either."

"Then what are you?"

"I am a spirit," he said, folding his hands across his breast and looking mysterious.

"What is your name, Mr. Spirit?"

"I am the spirit of the woods. I am known by many names. Some folks call me the 'Wise-and-Wonder-Man.'"

"Is that so?"

The little man nodded, "That's what I said."

"Well, I am glad to meet you. I have often heard of you. My mother has told me about you."

"Yes? And what, please, is your name? I have not the honor of your acquaintance, I believe."

"Oh, my name is John, but they call me Query Queer."

"Query Queer? Well, that is a queer name. What do they call you that for?"

"They call me Query because I ask so many questions, I suppose, and they call me Queer because my questions are queer, they say, but I don't think they are. I just ask what I want to know."

"So your mother has told you about me, has she? She must be a very well-informed woman."

"Yes, she is," said Query; "she knows a lot, 'most everything. But sometimes, when I ask her a question, she says that nobody knows but the Wise-and-Wonder-Man. And I have wanted to see you for a long, long time."

The little man made a very grave bow, and his eyes twinkled and his cap tinkled.

"Do you know," asked Query, lying down among the daisies, as if for an extended chat, "do you know everything? why robins' eggs are blue, and thrushes' eggs are speckled?"

The Wise - and - Wonder - Man nodded: "That's easy; they can't be any other color, and they just *have* to be that."

"Do you know why they put salt on a bird's tail to catch it, and why strawberries have their inside seeds on the outside?"

"I do." Another nod.

"Well, Mr. Wise-and-Wonder-Man, there is a very particular question that I want to ask you today."

"Indeed? what is it?"

"Where do the flowers come from?"

"Why, out of the ground, of course."

"Oh, I don't mean that," said Query, much annoyed, "but where did they come from in the first place?"

"You mean to ask, how there came to be any flowers?"

"Yes," said Query.

"Well," said the Wise-and-Wonder-Man, as he took off his blue cap with the silver bells, and put it on his knee and settled down for quite a story, "it's a long time since I thought about that, but as near as I can remember the story is something like this:

"Ever so many centuries ago the world was bare and gray as the street. The Earth King grew very tired of it, and covered the earth with a beautiful carpet of green. We call it grass. For years and years there was nothing but green until the Earth King grew as tired of the green as he had grown of the gray. He decided that he must have more colors.

So one day he took his royal retinue and journeyed to a hillside where he knew there grew the very finest grasses in all the kingdom. At a blast of the king's bugler the grasses assembled, and the king addressed them in simple words: "My faithful grasses. It is many years since I placed you here. You have been faithful. You have kept true green. It now pleases me to announce to you that I am about to reward a certain number of you and make you to be lords and ladies of the field. Tomorrow I shall come hither at this same hour. You are to assemble before me, and the fairest of your number and the most pleasing I will honor with great and lasting honor. Farewell."

Then what a whispering and putting of heads together there was among the grasses, as the breeze crept up the hillside. They arose next morning before the sun that they might wash their ribbons in the gleaming pearls of dew. What prinking and preening! What rustling of ruffles and sashes! What burnishing of armor and spears! At length the king's bugle rang out that called them to the grand assembly. Full of excitement, they stood before the king, each hoping

that he might be chosen for one of the great honors.

The king greeted them as on the previous day, and told them again of the high honor that he was about to bestow. "But," said he, "in this Court of Judgment I must have willing servants to assist me. First, I must have a keeper of the gate so that no outsider may enter. Which one of this host will be keeper of the gate?"

Not a man-grass stirred in his tracks, for each feared that if he became a servant of the king, he would lose his chance to be made a lord.

"Which one," asked the king again, "which one will volunteer to keep the gate for me?"

At this moment a sturdy grass was seen coming down the hillside. He was not handsome, but he was strong, his shoulders were broad, and his chest was deep, and he was armed to the teeth. Spear points stuck from every pocket, arrows filled his belt, and in each hand he carried a lance sharp as lightning. "Let these wait for their honors," thought he, as he said, "*I will serve the King.*"

"So be it," said the King, "take your sta-

tion at the gate. And now," continued the King, "I must have a herald to announce my awards and my commands. Who will be my herald?"

Again there was silence among the man-grasses till at last one of them was seen to advance. He was short and round and smiling, as happy a grass as grew on the hill. He came before the King as fast as his short legs could carry him. "So it please the King, I'll be his royal herald."

"So be it," replied the King. "Stand here at my feet."

"Two torch-bearers I need," said the King, "two torch-bearers, tall and comely, to hold the lights on high. Who will serve the King as torch-bearers?"

And now there was silence and stiffness among the lady-grasses as each, fearing to lose her chance to be made a lady, waited for the others. At length two slender maidens advanced with glowing faces and hesitant step. They were not as beautiful, it must be said, as some of their sisters. Their ribbons were few and some of them were frayed. They scarcely knew whether the king would accept them, but they meekly offered them-

selves. "We, O King, will be your torch-bearers."

"The King looked pleased enough as he replied, "So be it, indeed. Stand here on either hand."

"And now," continued the King, "I must have an incense bearer, to swing my censer over the meadows. Who will be my incense bearer?"

For a moment there was silence again among the lady-grasses, but only for a moment, for out stepped one of the daintiest of them all. She tripped quickly and quietly down the hill to the King, saying modestly as she approached, "I will be your incense bearer."

"Let it be so," said the King. "Await my commands."

"Yet one more willing servant," said the King, "one more. Who will ring the chimes? Man or maid, who among all these loyal subjects will ring the chimes?"

Scarcely had the King's words left his lips, when one of the noblest grasses of all, her broad green ribbons rustling as she moved, left the crowded ranks of the ladies and eagerly advanced before the King. "If it please Your Majesty, I will ring the chimes."

Then the King looked around satisfied upon his eager and expectant audience, and spoke a few brief words to them. He had come, he said, fearing that the task was almost too great even for a king, — to choose among so many and so beautiful subjects. But they had chosen for themselves, and he had now only to award the honors.

“Keeper of the gate!” he commanded, “stand before the King.”

The keeper of the gate came awkwardly forward, pricking all who brushed against him as he passed.

“Because you have been willing to serve the King,” said the monarch, “I reward you with distinguished honor.” Then, taking from the hand of a page a great velvet cap of purplish red, he placed it upon the head of the Gate-Keeper, saying as he did so, “I dub you: My Lord, the Thistle.”

“Let the King’s herald stand forth!”

The little round happy herald obeyed and knelt before the King. The King took a great golden coronet from the hand of a page and placed it upon his head, saying as he did so, “Because of your readiness to serve your king, I create you a noble of the field, and

dub you: My Lord, the Dandelion. And I give you this trumpet on which to blow."

"Let the torch-bearers stand forth!"

Then the two shy maidens from either side of the King bowed before him. On the head of each the King placed a shining crown, one all gold, and one gold rimmed with white, that they might not be confused, and he said to them, "Because of your generous deed I dub you: Lady Buttercup and Lady Daisy."

"My incense bearer!"

The dainty maiden courtesied at his feet and, blushing, bowed her head.

The King beckoned to a page, who brought him a tiny hood of most becoming blue. This the King placed upon her head, saying the while: "The King is grateful for your service. I dub you: Lady Violet."

"The ringer of the royal chimes, let her appear!"

The beautiful grass with the broad, shining ribbons stood proudly before him, and bowed her head in salute. The King took a silver bell and gave it to her, saying as he did so, "This shall be the sign of your royal office. I dub you: Lady Lily-of-the-Field."

The King then charged his new-made lords

and ladies that they should be faithful to their offices and never cease, year by year, to beautify the earth. Then the assembly was dissolved, but not until the whole host of grasses on the hillside had applauded what the King had done. They were disappointed and grieved, it is true, but they were not too jealous to know that the bravest and truest and most beautiful had been crowned with honor due.

“And that,” said the Wise-and-Wonder-Man, “is how the flowers came, as I remember the ancient tale.”

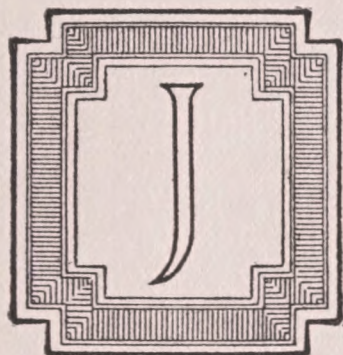
“But there are other flowers,” said Query Queer. “Where did they come from? Were they also made lords and ladies by the Earth King?”

“Oh, yes,” said the little man on the stump, “but that was afterward. Come now, shake hands, and I’ll be off.”

Then just what happened, Query Queer does not know. All he knows is that he heard a tinkling of silver bells, and that when he rubbed his eyes and went up to the stump there was nobody there.

*The Golden Horse and His
Rider*

The Golden Horse and His Rider



JUST round the corner in a certain village stood the little shoemaker shop. It was called The Boys' Retreat because the boys were there so much to listen to the stories without number that Uncle Zed had to tell. Uncle Zed was the shoemaker. Every day except Sunday he was at his bench, and every day on the shiny bench, just across the narrow room, beyond the pile of old shoes and thick leather, there was almost always to be found a group of the village boys, listening to the kindly shoemaker, with his bald head and big glasses and striped apron, as he told some story, new or old, it didn't much matter which, as he kept peg-peg, peg-peg, peg-pegging away at a shoe.

Uncle Zed had scarcely begun work one morning when the door flew open and there stood before him one of his favorite boys.

"Good morning, Uncle Zed! Is it going to rain?"

"Well, I don't know, Jack," said Uncle Zed deliberately.

"Well, do you *think* it's going to rain? Say 'Yes.'"

"Say 'Yes'?" asked Uncle Zed, questioningly.

"Yes, mother says she wants me to do an errand that will take 'most all the morning, if you think it isn't going to rain. But if you think it *is*, she says that I may stay in and play with my new saw and plane. Say it's going to rain, please."

"Well," said Uncle Zed, as he looked over his glasses out through the low door and up at the top of the stable across the street, "the golden horse up there points to the south, and when he points that way, the weather is likely to be fair."

"Do you mean that weathervane? Because I hate a weathervane."

"So?" asked Uncle Zed slowly.

"Yes, the teacher says Jim Brown is a weathervane. I don't think much of Jim. First he said he wouldn't and then he said he would, and then he said he wouldn't, and the

teacher said, 'Jim Brown, you are a weather-vane.'"

"I don't believe your teacher ever heard the story of the Golden Horse and his Rider, or she wouldn't think the weathervane was so bad."

"I don't know. I know I never heard it. Won't you tell it to me, Uncle Zed?" and he sat down comfortably on the shiny bench.

Uncle Zed picked up a shoe, looked at it carefully, turned it over and over the way he always did when he was getting ready to tell a story, put it on the last, and began to peg, peg-peg, peg-peg, peg away, and, as he did so, he talked:

Once upon a time, so I heard a great many years ago, there lived away off somewhere a king and his people. They were a peaceable folk, but not very brave, and withal they were happy and contented, until a terrible sickness fell upon them. Many died, among them the king's son. At length the king was stricken with the terrible plague. He called to his side the most skilful physicians of the realm, but they could do him no good. He summoned the magicians, but they gave him no help. Then he sought the priests of the

tribe. They built a great fire upon the altar before the temple on the hillside and stood before it, and said strange things that you and I could not understand. The king knelt before the altar, lifted up his hands and prayed to the Great Spirit that he would tell him how to regain his health.

When the king finished his prayer, the great column of smoke that rose straight from the altar bent over and pointed to the North, and a great voice out of the altar said,

“A draught from the frozen fountain.”

Then the smoke pointed to the East and the voice said,

“The blue flower from the seaside.”

Then again the smoke pointed to the South and the same voice said solemnly,

“A white stone from the desert.”

And the smoke rose straight upward again and all was still.

The chief priest told the king the meaning of it all. If one should get a draught from the frozen fountain in the North, some blue flowers from the seaside, and some of the magic rock from away to the South, the doctors could brew a healing drink for the king and he would surely recover.

Then the king called a great assembly of the men of the tribe, and told them of the voice that came from the altar and the words of the priest. "Now," said the king, "who will go for me? The journey is long and hard and dangerous. To the man who is brave enough to go I will give a ring, and I will put a golden chain around his neck and he shall be second ruler of the land. Whoever will go, let him now stand before the king."

For a time no one stirred, for, as I have said, they were not a brave people. Then the ranks opened and a young man, scarcely yet a man in body, slender, fair of face, with flaxen hair, pressed his way to the feet of the king. "If it please His Majesty, I will go for the king."

"What is your name, and what is your father's name?"

"My name is Olute, and my father is only one of the king's gardeners. I am of humble birth, but if there be no worthier, I will serve the king."

The king gave command that his favorite horse should be made ready. The servant led it out, — large, beautiful, and yellow as

gold. With his own hands the king threw a royal cloak over the slender shoulders of the lad. For a moment the king's face was full of light as he thought of the healing brew; the next it clouded. The lad seemed too young for a journey so long and terrible. "Go not, my lad," he said. "I fear you never can reach the frozen fountain. Let some one older go. Beware of the North Wind. It chills the marrow, it freezes the blood."

But Olute was undaunted:

*"Let it chill my marrow and freeze my blood,
I fear not the wind, — nor anything.
I on this noble horse of mine
Will face the North for love of the king."*

And with that he touched his foot to the stirrup, swung into the saddle, and was off so quickly that he did not hear the king say, "God bless thee, lad!" And the retreating hoof-beats on the pavement —

*Clickety clack, clickety clack, clickety clack;
Kut-tur-r-rup, kut-tur-r-rup, kut-tur-r-rup,*
seemed to say:

*"I will be back, I will be back, I will be back;
Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up."*

The king was right. The North Wind

blew fierce and cutting. It smote horse and rider in the face like a sword. It chilled the marrow, it seemed to freeze the blood. Yet Olute pressed on; not for a moment did he think of turning back. When at times he almost despaired of threading his way through the cold mountains, and gaining the summit, he would whisper to the horse as he stroked his neck with hands quite numb, "For love of the king, for love of the king!" and then new courage seemed to come.

At length, one evening after many a day, he passed the summit and spied a light, the torch which the old monk at the fountain kept burning to guide the chance traveler. The monk noted the king's horse and the royal cloak, and gave the best of his store to horse and messenger.

After a day of refreshment Olute filled his leather bottle at the frozen fountain and made ready his noble horse.

"Whither do you ride, my lad?" asked the monk, unwilling to see him go.

"The king is ill, I go to the East, to the seaside, to pluck the blue flower that will heal the king."

The monk tried in vain to dissuade him.

“Go not to the sea till the warmer days are come. The way is dangerous. Beware of the East Wind; it is full of snow and hail. The fierce blizzard will smother you. It will take your breath and blind your eyes.”

But Olute could not be persuaded:

*“Let it take my breath and blind my eyes,
I fear not the storm, — nor anything.
I on this noble horse of mine
Will face the East for love of the king.”*

Then he touched his toe to the stirrup, swung into the saddle, and was off before the monk could give him his blessing, and the retreating hoof-beats on the ice —

*Crunchety crunch, crunchety crunch, crunchety crunch,
Kur-tur-r-rup, kut-tur-r-rup, kut-tur-r-rup,*

seemed to say:

*“At once, at once, — at once, at once, — at once, at once,
Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up.”*

The monk was right. Scarcely had Olute ridden beyond the good man's gaze when the fearful East Wind, full of snow and ice, the dread blizzard from the East, smote him and his horse full in the face. It took his breath away, it blinded his eyes. It seemed as if he

must perish in the deep snows that filled the way. But over and over again, when the way seemed impossible, he would say, "For love of the king, for love of the king." Then new strength seemed to come, and he pressed on till one day the wind blew softer and birds flew over his head, and he knew that the sea was near. Before night he came to the great lighthouse on the cliffs. When the keeper of the light saw the royal cloak, he gave the best he had to horse and messenger.

After a day of refreshment Olute filled his bosom with the blue flowers that he found among the crags along the coast, and made ready his horse. The keeper of the light was unwilling to see him go. "Whither do you ride?" he inquired.

"To the South," said Olute. "The king is ill. In the desert, so the priests say, there is a white stone that will bring him health. I must ride to fetch it."

The keeper warned him that he should not go. "The hot wind is blowing from the desert. It is terrible. It will blister your cheek and parch your throat. You will never live to reach the land of the white stone. Do not go, my boy."

But Olute would not listen to the warning of the hot wind:

*“Let it blister my cheek and parch my throat,
I fear not the heat, — nor anything.
I on this noble horse of mine
Will face the South for love of the king.”*

And with that he touched his foot to the stirrup, swung into the saddle, and was off, while the light-keeper breathed a prayer for him, and the hoof-beats on the rocky road —

*Cheng-a-cheng, cheng-a-cheng, cheng-a-cheng,
Kut-tur-r-rup, kut-tur-r-rup, kut-tur-r-rup,*

seemed to say:

*“On again, on again, on again,
Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up.”*

It was a fearful journey to the South. The lighthouse keeper was right. The hot wind blistered his cheek and parched his throat. There was neither shelter nor shade from the scorching heat. Horse and rider were many a time ready to faint. But when the heat became most unbearable Olute would whisper to himself, “For love of the king, for love of the king!” and ride onward with new courage.

At length, toward evening of a long and terrible day, Olute caught sight of something white on the horizon. It was the white cliff

of the desert, from which he was to fetch the magic stone that he sought.

There was no refuge or lighthouse near, where he might gain refreshment, but there was a great tree and some green grass where horse and rider could rest.

Next day, with the precious stone in his bag, the blue flower in his bosom, and the draught from the frozen fountain in his leather bottle, he mounted again and turned his faithful horse homeward toward the West. How refreshing was now the west wind that blew in their faces! Had it not been for that, they might never have reached home again. The horse was weary and broken, and stumbled as he went, yet he ever rose again at a word from his rider. After many days they came within sight of the city walls.

As Olute approached the city gates he heard the great bell of the temple and inquired of travelers what it meant.

"Why, do you not know? The king is sick, is dying, may even now be dead. The bell summons all to prayer."

Without a word Olute put spurs to his horse. Up to the gates he dashed, past the guard, to the door of the castle, where he dismounted

and hastened to the king's bedside with the precious things that he had brought from the North, the East, and the South.

After a time the great bell ceased. The next morning it began again, but this time it rang joyously, for the king was better. The strange medicine from far away brought the king back to health and the people were once more happy.

But it was long before Olute heard the good news. The fearful winds had done their work, and Olute had nearly given his life for the king. For many days he lay sick of a burning fever, and often he seemed to be patting his horse on the neck and talking to him. But one day the fever left him, and he grew well again.

Then the king called a great assembly of the people, and in the presence of them all he put upon the finger of the lad a great ring, hung about his neck a golden chain, and proclaimed him the second ruler of the land. Then said the king:

"Your name is Olute. It will be changed. Henceforth we shall call you Res-olute, which means, The-Man-Who-Faces-The-Wind."

But all was not so well with the great horse.

The journey was his last. The winds had taken his life. All was done for him that men were wise enough to do. The king was often seen to stand by him in the royal stable, and to put his arm affectionately around the great, proud neck. But he died, and went to the land where all good horses go.

The king gave orders that his artists should make a statue of the horse as like him in color and form as they could make it, and set it up in the great square. So the artists made a horse of gold for the king.

When the day came on which it was to be set up on its great pillar, the people gathered to see the sight. The workmen lifted it up and put it in place amid the shouts of the people. Then — would you believe it? — the wind suddenly changed from west to north and the golden horse turned to face it, as the real horse had faced it for the king. The people were frightened; they thought he was alive. Some fled; some fell down and prayed. Little by little they lost their fear and came to believe that it was the spirit of the king's horse that was in the statue that made it turn and always face the wind. And by and by the people learned to come and

look at the horse when they desired to know which way the wind was blowing and what the weather was to be.

The shoemaker made a long pause, which was the sign that that was the end of the story.

"And that is the reason, is it, Uncle Zed, why some folks have those little golden horses on their barns?" asked Jack.

"That's what I have heard," replied Uncle Zed.

There was another pause.

"Well," said Jack, "I think I must be going."

"Going? Where, Jack?"

"Oh, on that errand for mother."

"Better wait awhile, Jack," said Uncle Zed, trying to be serious and looking over his glasses again and out through the little door, "the horse points a *little* more to the East. It may possibly rain, and then you would get wet."

"Who cares?" said Jack. "I'm not afraid," and he darted out of the door and was off. And Uncle Zed smiled, and smiled, and smiled, as he went on peg, peg-peg, peg-peg-pegging away.

The Shepherd Who Didn't Go

The Shepherd Who Didn't Go



YOU have all heard of the shepherds who went to Bethlehem, but I do not believe any of you have heard of the shepherd who didn't go. The Bible does not say anything about him, but his story has come to me, and I am going to tell it to you.

The city of Bethlehem stood on a hill. Below the town, with its steep narrow streets and white walls, were gray olive orchards. Below the orchards were gardens bright with flowers. Below the gardens lay green meadows, and beyond these the pasture-lands that stretched away to the wilderness plains where little patches of grass grew among the bushes and between the great rocks. There were caves among these rocks where wolves used to skulk and sometimes robbers hid. So the

shepherds who guarded their flocks in these wild pastures dared not leave them alone.

One clear beautiful night, many centuries ago, four shepherds were watching their flocks on these pastures. Samuel, Ezra, Joel, and Dahvid were their names. Samuel, Ezra, and Joel were strong men, no longer young, with shaggy eyebrows and brown beards; Ezra's was short, Joel's long, and Samuel's streaked with gray. They owned the flocks which they tended. Dahvid was a boy with ruddy cheeks, bright eyes, and strong lithe limbs. He cared for the flocks of old Abraham. Abraham was old and rich, and did not work any more, but hired Dahvid, whose family was very poor, to care for his sheep.

The flocks of the four shepherds were lying quiet on the plain far below the city, and near by Samuel, Ezra, Joel, and Dahvid lay wrapped in their shepherd cloaks.

"Samuel," said Dahvid, rising upon his elbow.

"What is it, Dahvid?" asked the other in a deep voice.

"Are you not glad that you tend sheep in Bethlehem instead of in some distant place?"

"Why, Dahvid?" asked Samuel sleepily.

"Because it is in Bethlehem that the King we have been looking for so long is to be born. I have been reading it in the prophets only today."

"Have you only just heard of that?" asked Ezra sourly.

"No," replied the boy hotly. "I have heard my mother tell of it ever since I can remember, and I have read it over and over again. Samuel!"

"Yes, Dahvid?"

"Do you think we shall ever see the promised King?"

"I do not know, my boy," the older man answered sadly. "We have waited long, and there seems little hope for Israel now. But he will come some day, he will come some day. Why do you ask, Dahvid?"

"I cannot tell. It is often in my mind. Something makes me think of it tonight. Perhaps it is because I read of him today. Samuel, I would walk to the end of the earth to see the Christ-child."

"Well, you need not start now," grumbled Ezra, and Joel added roughly, "Go to sleep, boy, the hour is late."

It was much later before Dahvid fell asleep,

for his head was full of dreams, and the stories of wonderful days to come that his mother had told him. But at length he joined the rest in healthy slumber.

Suddenly it seemed to each of them that something passed over him, and touched him lightly on the cheek. The older men raised themselves on their elbows, but Dahvid sprang to his feet. At first they saw only a great light, which nearly blinded them, then they discerned a shining form in the sky, and heard a voice saying: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

And then all the sky was full of light, and the air was full of heavenly voices, singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

While the shepherds listened, half joyful, half afraid, the light faded and the voices floated away, — "Good will to men — to men — to men," and all was still as before. For

a moment the shepherds looked at each other in silent awe and wonder. Then Ezra spoke in a voice dry with fear. "What was it?"

Dahvid stood speechless, and Samuel answered reverently, "Angels."

"Brothers," he continued, "a wonderful thing has happened to us. It has been a long, long day since angels have spoken to men."

Then he girded his shepherd's cloak about him and seized his staff. "Come, Ezra, Joel, Dahvid, let us be going."

"Going — where?" asked Ezra and Joel.

"Why, to Bethlehem to see the Child. Did not the angel tell us the sign? Let us go at once to find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

"There be many mangers in Bethlehem," objected Ezra.

"I know not how we shall find him," said Joel. "It is a vain search, I fear," and he drew his cloak about him and reached for his staff, "but I will go with you if you say."

So they started, Samuel, Ezra, and Joel, — but Dahvid stood still.

"Come, Dahvid, make haste!" called Samuel.

But the boy did not move.

"I cannot go," he said.

"Cannot go!" cried Samuel in amazement; and Ezra added, "Who said but a little while ago that he would go to the end of the earth to see the King?"

"And so I would," cried Dahvid; "but the sheep — we cannot leave the sheep alone."

"The sheep will be safe enough," said Samuel. "The dogs will keep them together. There are no wolves tonight. Come, Dahvid."

But the boy was firm. "There is my master; he'll be angry if I leave his flocks alone."

"Old Abraham will never know," said Joel.

"Abraham is a hard master," said Dahvid. "Many a time I have felt his heavy staff on my back. But it is not that which keeps me. I have given him my word that, come day, come night, come life, come death, I will not fail to keep the flocks. Go on without me; I must keep my word. Go on."

So they went on, impatient and eager for this wondrous quest, Ezra and Joel muttering now and then at the obstinacy of the boy, but Samuel full of glowing admiration. Dahvid watched them as they moved up the hill. That dream of finding the Christ-child, —

how could he give it up? Once he started forward: "*I will go!*" But something held him back, and he threw himself on the ground and kept back tears of bitter disappointment. After a time he grew calmer, and found a certain comfort in thinking of the helplessness of his flock.

Suddenly the low growling of his dog brought him to his feet. But he saw nothing, heard nothing, and bade the dog be still. In a moment, with a bark of alarm, the dog was up again and away. Dahvid sprang up, certain now that danger was near. There was panic in the flock. Toward the wilderness he could see lean, gray forms, moving stealthily and swiftly among the sheep. Wolves! Springing upon a rock, and waving his cloak in circles about his head, he uttered the familiar call which gathered the sheep about him, his own sheep nearest, and behind them the flocks of Samuel, Ezra, and Joel. The wolves made off and Dahvid quickly looked over his flock to see if all were there, — for the Eastern shepherd knows his sheep by name.

One by one he named them, with an increasing feeling of relief. They were all there.

No! One was missing, — Ke-barbara, the pet of the flock. Ke-barbara means striped, and the little sheep was so called because of the dark marking of her fleece. After waving his staff over the huddled beasts, and uttering a few times the soothing cry, “Hoo-o-o, ta-a-a! hoo-o-o, ta-a-a!” he rushed off in the direction which the wolves had taken. At the top of the steep bank, at the edge of the pasture, he stopped and called, “Ke-barbara! Ke-barbara!” and for answer heard an anguished bleat from the rocks below.

It was a steep and slippery way, but Dahvid plunged down with no thought of anything but the sheep. Loose stones gave way and he lost his footing. At the bottom he picked himself up unhurt, and there beside him were two wolves quarreling over the wounded sheep. One of them slunk away at sight of the boy, but the other had had a taste of blood and sprang at Dahvid, missing his throat but sinking his teeth into his arm. He sprang again, and this time tore his leg. Then Dahvid, as the beast turned to spring again, struck him a heavy blow on the head with his staff and killed him. His own wounds were bleeding and painful, but he

turned at once with caressing words to the sheep.

"Ke-barbara, they have hurt you, little sheep! But they have not killed you; no, they have not killed you! I reached you just in time. You cannot walk; can you? And I am afraid I cannot carry you. But I can help. There, put your head on my arm." He groaned with pain. "No, the other one." So he talked to her, as to a child, as the wounded boy and the wounded sheep slowly made their way up the steep hillside and over the rough rocks. It was not a long way, and, half an hour before, the sturdy shepherd lad would have bounded over it quickly enough. But now the wounded leg was slow, the wounded arm was weak, and the wounded lamb seemed very heavy. It was a weary journey, with many stops. When at last they reached the flock, still huddled trembling together, Dahvid had only strength to give one reassuring "Hoo-o-o, ta-a-a," then fell exhausted.

How long he lay there he did not know, but the dawn was growing bright, when three men appeared from the direction of the town. It was not the shepherds, but old Abraham

and two of his servants. As the old man caught sight of his flock, but saw no shepherd, he raged with anger. "Dahvid!" he shouted fiercely. "Dahvid!" There was no answer.

"The young vagabond! He has left the sheep. Of great worth are his promises! He would keep my flock. 'Come life — come death!' Dahvid! Let me once find him and I will give him something he will remember longer than he does his vows."

As he drew near the flock he discovered the boy lying on the ground. "Ah, asleep is he? and the sun this high! Come, get up!" he shouted fiercely, and lifted his staff to strike. But, as he did so, he caught sight of the white face and the bleeding arm, and noticed the wounded sheep. Old Abraham dropped his angry arm, and there was a touch of tenderness that was strange to him, as he continued: "Ah, Dahvid, boy! You did not forget your promises; did you, Dahvid? And I would have struck you! Forgive me, my lad." Then, turning to his servants, he gave them command: "Take him to the inn and bid them care for him. I, myself, will keep the flock today."

The servants bowed low, "The inn is full, my lord."

Old Abraham commanded again positively, "Take him to the inn, I say."

"But the inn is full, my lord," replied the older servant, trembling.

Then the other servant spoke, "There is perhaps room in the stable, my lord."

"Then bear him thither, and bid them give him the best of care. Go at once."

So the servants bore Dahvid away, still unconscious from his wounds, and made him comfortable on a bed of straw in the stable of the inn.

It was some hours before he came to himself. When at last he opened his eyes, and his ears began to catch once more the sounds about him, the first thing he heard was a faint cry. "What is that?" he asked eagerly of Samuel, who was watching beside him.

"That," said the old shepherd, in tones of mingled joy and reverence, "is the Child the angels told us about, the Child we came to see. We found him here in the stable, in a manger."

"And I am not to see him?"

"Yes, you are," said Samuel, and a grave-

faced man brought the Child and laid Him in Dahvid's arms, the Child for whose coming the people had been longing for a thousand years.

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The color at length came back to Dahvid's white cheeks and strength and health to his limbs, and he went back again to the plain. Old Abraham embraced him. "Forgive me, my son. I have been a hard master. Thou hast been very faithful, and for thy reward I make thee lord over all my flocks, and half of them shall be thine own."

So Dahvid became a man of flocks, and all his days he was known among the other shepherds as the one who had held the Christ-child in his arms. And there was none among them who was thought so brave, and gentle, and wise as the Shepherd Who Didn't Go.

The House of Beautiful Days

The House of Beautiful Days



MOST boys and girls whom I know do not like a rainy day. Sometimes, of course, they do, especially if it be a Sunday and they do not have to go to church, or a school-day if it storms hard enough so that they do not have to go to school. But I never saw many boys and girls who really enjoyed a rainy Saturday. And the day that I have in mind *was* a rainy Saturday, and the boy who did not like it was Jack Oliver.

It had been rather a dreary day for Jack, and now as the afternoon wore on he was so restless that he did not know what to do. "Why do rainy days come, anyway?" he whined to his mother, who sat quietly sewing in the big, comfortable library. "I hate a rainy day. I wish there wasn't a rainy day in the world. What can I do?"

"Why don't you read?"

"I *have* read till my eyes ache."

"Then why not work at your bench?"

"My chisel's dull, and my mallet's broken,
— I broke it yesterday."

"Then why don't you do a puzzle?"

"I have done all the puzzles," he whined away, "except the one that I *can't* do."

"Well, then," said his mother, "why don't you change the weather?"

"*I'm* not the weather man," growled Jack.

"You do not need to be. Anybody can change the weather, if he wants to do so and tries hard enough. Did I never tell you about it? Well, they say that if you look right into the face of the clock, and say:

*"Tick, tock, old clock,
Tell the time of day;
Wave your hands, and strike your bell,
And chase the rain away."*

and *keep on* saying it, the weather will change, and the rain will go away."

Jack pricked up his ears.

This was something new at least.

"Why don't you do it?" said his mother.

Jack thought he would, especially as his mother was at that moment called away, and

he must make some shift for his own amusement. So he gathered up a sofa pillow, threw himself on the floor at full length before the big clock, and began his rhyme.

"But do you think, mother," he called, "that the weather will really change if I say it?"

"I haven't a doubt of it, Jack," said his mother at the door, "*if you say it long enough.*"

It had seemed to Jack, all day, that the clock looked grim and sour. It was too solemn, with its tick-tock-tick-tock. But now as he looked at its white face and brass hands it really seemed quite friendly. So he began his rhyme:

*"Tick, tock, old clock,
Tell the time of day;
Wave your hands, and strike your bell,
And chase the rain away."*

Over and over he said it, looking up and out of the window now and then to see whether the rain was really going away. He was almost on the point of giving it up, when a marvelous thing happened. Astride the big ball on the pendulum, as if he were riding a horse, sat the jolliest little man that you ever saw. On his back was a bright red

coat, on his head a bright red cap, and on his face a bright broad smile, — and he rode so furiously back and forth that his coat tails stuck straight out behind, so that you could see their dainty blue lining.

Before Jack could open his eyes for a better look, the door of the old clock opened and out jumped the little man.

“What was that I heard you saying just now? Something about ‘chase the rain away’? Don’t you like a rainy day?”

“No, I hate it. I wish there never was a rainy day. I wish I lived where every day was beautiful.”

“Well, then, come with me, and I will take you there.”

“But who are you?” asked Jack, for he was not accustomed to travel with strangers.

“My name,” said the little red man, “is Mr. Fancy Featherfoot. I know everything that boys want to know, and can take them anywhere they wish to go. So put on your cap and come with me, quick, and I’ll take you up to the House of Beautiful Days.”

“But how shall we get up there?” asked Jack.

“This way,” said Mr. Fancy as he took

from his jacket pocket the daintiest little ladder that you ever saw. It had golden sides, and silver rounds between, and would unfold to go just as high as one wished to go. Mr. Fancy set it up in the corner right by the clock, and quick as a squirrel began to climb, while Jack came panting after. Right up through the ceiling they climbed to the up-stairs room, right up through that to the attic, right up through the attic to the roof. When Jack saw that they were going through the roof he called to his guide, "Wait a minute, till I get my coat."

"You won't need any coat; stick this in your cap, and you won't mind the weather,

*The good cheer feather
Brings fair weather."*

Up and up and up they climbed till they came to a great, big, white landing which looked like a cloud. Jack was afraid to step on it for fear he would fall through, but when he saw Mr. Fancy walk about on it, he grew bold and joined him. Up a flight of beautiful white steps, just like the landing, they went, and entered the door of a magnificent white house. Great white walls reached as high as any one could see.

Over them was a roof of the bluest sky, and down from it hung a million twinkling lights like stars.

"This," said the little red man, "is the House of Beautiful Days, and these people that you see everywhere about are the beautiful days."

Jack had never in all his life, not even at the circus, seen so many people, nor people dressed in such gay and fantastic clothes. As far away as he could see were these delightful little people and their wonderful clothes. I say "little people," for they all seemed rather small to Jack, — and young.

Near at hand were some that had long, black rubber boots on, red jackets on their backs, red hats on their heads, from which the water ran in little streams. And when they removed their hats, in salute, you could see that their hair was all covered with dew-drops, which also hung from the ears and the nose.

"Who are these?" asked Jack.

"These," said Mr. Fancy, "are the beautiful rainy days. They make the pools, you see, the streams and the waterfalls."

Then here were people dressed all in gold,

leggings of gold and jackets of gold, and they had sunbeams stuck this way and that in their hair.

"And who are these?" asked the boy.

"These," was the reply, "are the beautiful sunshiny days. They pick up the sunbeams that fall on the floor of the House of Beautiful Days."

Here were folks all clad in gray, like little cadets, and their gray coats and gray caps were bordered with red berries like holly. Their little faces looked serious, yet they were happy.

"These," said Mr. Fancy, "are the beautiful cloudy days. They love to roll up the clouds and play hide-and-seek with the moon."

Then here were people, among the gayest of them all, with garments like brightest rainbows. Now their faces were light and now again they were dark.

"These are the beautiful showery days, and with their little tinkling, silver hammers which you hear, they make and mend the rainbow bridges that reach from cloud to cloud."

There was also a great number of little white people, white from head to toe, and in their hands were silver spades.

"These," said Mr. Fancy, "as you no doubt can guess, are the beautiful snowy days. They shovel up the snowflakes that fall through the roof of this House of Beautiful Days. And these," he continued, as he pointed to a group, all stiff with daintiest lace up to their chins, and with icicles stuck like jaunty feathers in their lace-trimmed caps of ocean blue, "these are the beautiful frosty days. They love to make and climb the icicles that hang from the points of the stars."

Then Jack saw just one other group. Their hair was tossing about their merry faces. Ribbons streamed out behind from their clothes, and fluttered and flirted and flapped. "I suppose," said Jack, "that these are the beautiful windy days."

"Quite right, my boy. These chase and catch the breezes, and let them go again."

Such a gay and happy multitude this boy had never seen in all his life, and he looked and looked and looked. Hand in hand, he and his strange guide wandered through the House from end to end. They looked into the Hall of Hourly where the beautiful hours dwell, and into the Hall of Minutel where the

beautiful minutes dwell, and into the Hall of Secundum where the tiny seconds dwell.

"And what is this?" asked Jack, as he pointed to what looked like a throne, high and white, and overhead a canopy of purple laced with gold.

"This is the seat of the Great Father of the days. Once a day he sits upon it, as he comes to choose a new day and send it to the earth."

"Oh!" said Jack, "and how does he choose one? I've often wondered why we have a rainy day or a bright one. I suppose he listens and hears what the people want down below. If most folks want a rainy day, he sends one, and if most folks want a sunshiny day, he sends one, and just like that."

"Not at all, my boy, not at all."

"Then I suppose he says, '*Eeny, meeny, miny, mo,*' and the one that's it, he has to go."

"Not at all, my boy, not at all."

"Then he must just choose a day, because he wants to, and send it."

"Not at all, my boy, not at all."

"Then how does he do?"

"This way! Every night just before mid-

night the great chimes ring, and the Father comes out of the golden door over there, — *listen, WATCH!*”

The beautiful rich chimes rang out, the golden door opened, and forth came the oldest looking man that one ever saw. His hair was white, what there was of it, and hung about his ears; his face was white; his beard was white, and hung down low on his long white robe. A great scythe hung over his shoulder. Little minutes acted as pages, and held his train as he marched straight and kingly toward his seat.

“Father Time,” whispered Jack, as he nudged his guide.

The little red man nodded.

“How old is he?” he whispered.

“I don’t know — a hundred million years, if a day.”

“How long will he live yet?”

“I don’t know — a hundred million years, if a day.”

As the White Father stepped upon his throne Jack saw that all the wonderful host of days came forward close to the throne. Each knelt upon his right knee with a torch at his side. At a signal from the Father all

rose and stood in respectful silence as he addressed them:

“My children, and my faithful subjects, the time draws near when another day must journey to the world. ’Tis a long way, and a difficult task.

*To every creature he must go,
However high, however low,
To take them time, and light, and love,
And bear them beauty from above.*

*Now what brave day this task will dare
Shall straightway first lift torch in air.”*

It seemed to Jack that every torch went up at once, and for the life of him he could not tell how Father Time could see which was first. But he *could* see, for his eyes were sharp, and he beckoned to a day far in the rear.

Quietly the days fell back and made an aisle down which came the chosen day, — whether it was a rainy day or a sunshiny one I have forgotten, — and knelt on right knee before the throne, his torch burning brightly at his side.

Then Father Time bound him with a great oath that he would be faithful and beautiful.

He would carry "time and light and love." He would help men and women to do their work. Then the Father commanded the attendants to bind on the golden wings, — for all beautiful days fly fast, — and he put into his hands a golden book and a golden pen. In the book he was to write all things good which he saw, and all things bad, all things good which he heard, and all things bad, and the Father commanded, in solemn tone, that when the day's work was finished, he should carry the book to the Great King who lives beyond the world.

All this the beautiful day promised faithfully with hand upon his heart. Then the bugle sounded, the new-chosen day bowed to the Great Father, bowed to the days, who bowed in turn to him, rose upon his golden wings, and soared away.

The days turned quickly back to their work, the rainy days making the pools, the streams, and the waterfalls; the sunshiny days picking up the sunbeams that fell on the floor; the cloudy days rolling up the clouds, and playing hide-and-seek with the moon; the showery days making and mending the rainbow bridges that reached from cloud

to cloud; the snowy days shoveling the snow with their silver spades; the frosty days making and climbing the icicles that hung from the points of the stars; and the windy days chasing and catching the breezes and letting them go again.

Jack and his guide went over and sat on the landing and watched the beautiful day in its flight until it looked in the distance like the sunrise on a winter morning.

Then Jack spoke. "Mr. Fancy, when will the beautiful day come back?"

"It will never come back, my boy."

"Why not?"

"No beautiful day ever comes back. Did you not hear what Father Time said to the day when he put into his hand the golden book, — that he should carry it to the Great King who lives beyond the world?"

"Where does the Great King live, Mr. Fancy?"

"I do not know, my boy, nobody knows — somewhere beyond the world. But they say the place is very beautiful. There is a great white throne, and a beautiful stream and green trees on either side."

"Are there many days there?"

"Yes, a countless number. The days that knew each other here meet each other again in that beautiful country."

"Are there any people there?"

"Oh, yes! The days, as they go through the world, carry many with them on their strong wings to that land of delight."

How long they would have sat there no one can tell, had not Mr. Fancy plucked Jack by the sleeve.

"But, Jack, your mother will soon wonder what has become of you. We must get back. Come, after me"—and with that he was hopping down his ladder as nimbly as a squirrel, and Jack following after as fast as he could.

D-o-w-n, d-o-w-n, d-o-w-n they went, right through the roof of the house and through the attic, and through the up-stairs room right into the library in the corner by the old clock. Mr. Fancy folded up his wonderful ladder and with a jolly "good-by" was about to be off.

"Aren't you coming again, Mr. Fancy Featherfoot?"

"Why?"

"Because I shall want to go again to the House of Beautiful Days."

"Well, you may go whenever you wish."

"But I have no ladder."

"You may make one for yourself. I'd give you this one except that I must use it myself. I'll tell you how. Now — listen —" and he spoke very slowly, looking Jack straight in the eye and holding up one finger.

*"A happy heart
And a smiling face
And some rounds of laughter between."*

That ladder will take you up any day you wish to go."

And with that he jumped on the ball of the pendulum and went riding away at a furious pace, around the corner of the clock.

Then all at once it seemed to Jack as if the whole house fell right down on his shoulder. He turned quickly and saw, — that it was only Spike, the playful setter, that had come in when his mother had opened the door. Jack rubbed his eyes and looked around. The sun was shining in his face.

"Well, Jack," said his mother, "I guess you have had a nap. Look out-of-doors. Now do you believe that the weather will change if you say to the clock:

*'Tick, tock, old clock,
Tell the time of day;
Wave your hands and strike the bell
And chase the rain away'?*

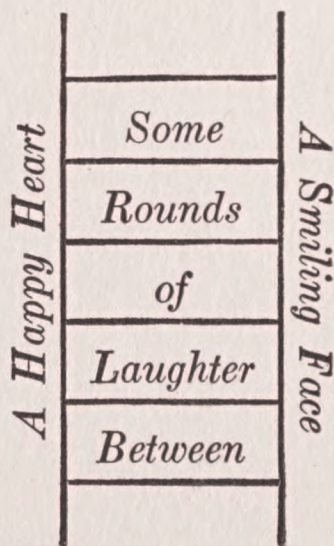
It's a *beau-tiful* day."

"All days are beautiful days, mother," answered Jack. Whereat his mother opened her eyes so wide that I am sure she was never more surprised in her life.

"Why! Jack. What do you mean?"

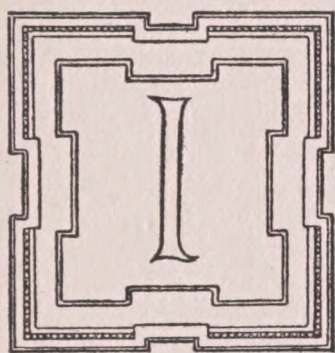
"I haven't time to tell you now. I promised Bob that if it stopped raining I'd go out to play. I'll tell you when I come in."

And he did. When he was ready for bed he told her all about his visitor and his trip to the House of Beautiful Days, and all about the magic ladder and how it was made, which, he said, was a kind of secret:



How the Bluebird was Chosen
Herald

How the Bluebird Was Chosen Herald



TOLD you a story once about Query Queer and the Wise-and-Wonder-Man. Query Queer was the boy who loved the woods and asked so many questions. The Wise-and-Wonder-Man was the spirit of the woods whom Query met one day and who answered Query's questions. Of course, as Query often went to the woods it was quite certain that he should sometime meet the spirit again. And so he did. It happened one day just as the snow was disappearing and the sun was growing warm. Query had been taking his first spring walk, and, as he was a bit tired, he sat down on the sunny slope of a knoll. He was scarcely seated when down out of the green boughs of a hemlock tree in front of him slid the Wise-and-Wonder-Man, dressed in his light blue suit with every button a

silver bell, and his pointed cap to match, with its fringe of silver bells. At every move he made, the bells went *tinkle-tankle, tinkle-tankle*. Query was so surprised that he almost forgot to breathe.

“Good morning, Query,” said the Wise-and-Wonder-Man, “what are you wondering about now?”

“I was just wondering,” said Query, nodding his head toward a bluebird near by, “why the bluebird is the first bird of spring.”

“Why, he is the herald, you know.”

“But how did he come to be the herald? Do you know?”

“I have heard,” said the Wise-and-Wonder-Man.

“Who told you?”

“My grandmother. She said her grandmother’s grandmother told the story; and what her grandmother’s grandmother’s grandmother said, my grandmother says is so.”

“Of course,” said Query. “Would you tell me the story?”

“Certainly; make yourself comfortable.”

Query lay down on one elbow and the Wise-and-Wonder-Man sat on a fresh, clean

chip, that the choppers had made, and talked:

You know there are four spirits of the year, Springtime, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. Some folks call them seasons, but they are *really* spirits. Of all four spirits Springtime is the favorite. He had been coming to the earth every year for a great many years, year after year, when he got it into his head that it would be a fine thing and quite becoming to his dignity to have a herald, — some one to carry his colors and play the fife. At first he thought of the fragrant flowers, they could bear his colors. But he reflected that they could not play the fife. Then he thought of the buzzing bee, he might be taught to play the fife. But he remembered that he would not do, because he could not carry the colors. So he decided that he must have a bird.

Springtime, being a very lively and practical spirit, called the birds together that very morning. He asked them all to meet him by the Great Rock under the Great Tree by the Great Bend of the Big River. They all came — birds of every size and color and description. He sat on the Great Rock while the birds sat on the grass and listened with wide,

round, blinking eyes and with heads cocked to one side.

He made a speech to them of some length. He told them that he desired a herald to carry his colors and to play the fife. Of course, the bird to be chosen should be handsome and musical. But he must be more than all that. He wanted a bird of exceptionally good character, in fact, the very best bird that could be found. He did not expect to find a perfect bird, he said, but he desired a bird as nearly perfect as he could obtain. He concluded his speech by saying that his herald should be:

*“Both handsome and happy, gifted and good,
And as modest as modest can be.
The very best bird that flies in the wood,
I would that my herald be he.”*

The choice, he said, he would leave to the birds as they knew each other thoroughly.

The birds put their heads together and talked in at least forty different languages. Finally, their spokesman told Springtime that they were content to leave the selection to a committee of six whom he might name. As Springtime wanted to be on good terms with

all the birds, he thought it not best that he should appoint the committee. He pulled a handful of grass and held it tightly between his hands just so that the ends would stick out, and then he asked the birds to come up, one by one, and pull out a blade. The six who should draw out the shortest blades of grass were to be the committee.

They walked up one by one, and drew. Mr. Crow drew the shortest blade and so was the chairman. Mr. Parrot came next, then Mr. Blue Jay, Mr. Robin, Mr. English Sparrow, and Mr. Bluebird. It was a strange committee, to be sure, of all sizes and kinds of birds.

That very evening the six birds met in a corner of Mr. Farmer's orchard upon a dead branch of an old apple tree. They talked and talked and talked. They discussed all the birds that they knew, spoke of their good qualities and their bad ones.

At last, as it grew late, very late, almost eight o'clock, and they had come to no conclusion, Mr. Bluebird proposed that they should vote, and all agreed. But how should they vote? That was the next question. Mr. Bluebird suggested that each one, as his

name was called, should stand up and say which bird he thought was best fitted to be the herald. Mr. Crow cleared his throat and said that he did not think this was the wisest way. He thought it better, he continued, that each one should write the name of his choice on the under side of a leaf. The other members of the committee agreed with Mr. Crow. Each bird, therefore, took a leaf, and wrote a name upon it, and Mr. Bluebird counted the votes. There was one vote for Mr. Crow, one vote for Mr. Parrot, one for Mr. Blue Jay, one for Mr. Robin, one for Mr. English Sparrow, and one for — I don't remember whether it was for Mr. Song Sparrow or Mr. Bobolink. Would you believe it? — every bird except the bluebird had voted for himself. The bluebird knew, because he knew the foot-writing of all the birds. He had seen it in the soft sand down by the water.

It was certain that they were not going to be able to decide among themselves who should be chosen, so Mr. Bluebird made another suggestion.

“I recommend,” he said, “that we go and consult the old Wizard, Mr. Owl, who holds court every night by the light of the moon

in the hollow of a great gray tree over the ridge. He is the wisest of birds and knows everything. I have heard, too, that whenever there is a star with a tail in the sky he can read your fortunes and your character. Now it so happens that at this very time there is in the sky a star with a tail, for I saw it this morning. Little Bluey, my eldest child, woke up very early and I had to fly out to get him a worm to keep him quiet. Just as I was starting, long before sunrise, I saw the comet. I propose that we go at once and consult the Wizard and let him decide for us who should be the herald."

"It seems to me," said the crow, "that this is a most excellent suggestion. The Wizard is certainly a very wise bird. I have heard of him and doubtless he has heard of me. By all means, let us go."

It was decided then and there that they should go that very night, just as soon as the comet rose. Mr. Bluebird was to give the signal because he knew where to look for the comet.

At the proper moment Mr. Bluebird shook them all by the wing and woke them up, and they started, Mr. Crow going first, then Mr.

Parrot, Mr. Blue Jay, Mr. Robin, Mr. English Sparrow, and Mr. Bluebird.

They flew and they flew and they flew, for it was a long way and a hard way to find, and not one of the six had ever been out so late in his life. When they reached the wood they were obliged to fly very carefully, so that they should not bump their heads against the trees, and so that they might be able to read the signs along the way. At length they spied a great gray tree, with a dimly lighted window in it, far up the trunk. Mr. Crow read the name on the door-plate and announced that they had reached the right house. There was no door-bell so Mr. Crow scratched three times, — scratch, scratch, scratch.

“Who-who?” came from within.

“Friends,” said the crow, “six friends come to consult the Wizard.”

The latch was promptly lifted, and the six birds walked solemnly in and up the stairs.

They found themselves in a little dark round room with seats against the sides. Mr. Owl sat over on one side, his great fluffy coat turned up at the neck and his

fluffy hood pulled down to meet it. He had his spectacles on and was reading by the light of his lamp, — that is, it looked like a lamp, but Mr. Owl explained later that it was not a lamp but the comet's light which he caught through a knot-hole.

The Wizard received them pleasantly and motioned to them to be seated. Mr. Crow sat down in front of the Wizard at his right, then the others in order, Mr. Bluebird sitting at the left.

"It is very late," observed the owl. "It must be most important business that brings you to me at this hour of the night."

"It is," replied the crow, "exceedingly important business, indeed."

Then in plain and emphatic words he told the Wizard what their errand was. He repeated as nearly as he could the speech of Springtime, especially the last words:

*"Both handsome and happy, gifted and good,
And as modest as modest can be.
The very best bird that flies in the wood,
I would that my herald be he."*

He told the Wizard of their inability to decide who should be chosen and of their

conclusion to leave the choice to him. This was the reason of their visit.

Then the owl looked grave as a judge and remarked, "It seems to me in this situation that the first thing to be done is to secure the opinion of each of you as to who is the fittest bird to be chosen. Mr. Crow, will you be so good as to give us your opinion?"

Mr. Crow stood up, cleared his throat, and said, "To speak quite frankly, it seems to me that I, myself, should be chosen. It is scarcely possible to find a better bird."

"What makes you think so?" asked the owl dryly.

"My wife," said the crow. "Only today Mrs. Crow said to me, 'Mr. Crow, my dear husband, you are a perfect man, unless ——'"

"Unless what?" inquired the Wizard, raising his eyebrows.

"I don't recollect," replied the crow, "in fact, I didn't hear distinctly, but I am sure it was something unimportant," and he sat down.

"Mr. Parrot," said the Wizard, "your opinion, if you please."

"It is my opinion," said Mr. Parrot, "that I am the bird who should be chosen. I have

heard myself talk on many an occasion, and I am sure that I speak both wisdom and wit. In modesty, I forbear to say more."

"Mr. Blue Jay!" called the Wizard.

"Since you ask me, Mr. Wizard, for my honest opinion, I am bound to say that I feel that I am the only bird for this position. I have been looking in the glass today; in fact, I see myself in the glass very often, and I have never yet observed a single fault in myself. There is no bird who can say more."

"Mr. Robin, if you please."

Mr. Robin arose with his fingers in his armholes: "I am quite convinced, Mr. Wizard, from much observation, that I should be made the herald. I am handsome and gifted, if I do say it myself. Besides, I live in the best of society; I dwell in the Bishop's orchard. This very day I heard the Bishop say, 'That robin is a fine, handsome bird, — as fine and handsome as a Bishop.' I am sure that recommendation is enough."

"Mr. English Sparrow!"

"I am sure, Mr. Wizard," said the sparrow, speaking very rapidly and excitedly, "that while I am not so big as some of these who have spoken, I have a better claim than any

of them to this high office. For I have long made it a practice to study carefully the faults and weaknesses of all the other birds, and I know that I have none of their failings."

"Mr. Bluebird," said the Wizard, "what have you to say?"

"Nothing, Mr. Wizard. I have not made up my mind. I leave the matter entirely to your eminent wisdom and judgment." And he sat down.

"Well," said the owl, after a moment's deliberation, "the next thing to do under these circumstances seems to be to read your fortunes, that is, your characters, in the light of the comet. I shall ask you, one by one, to step up on this judgment-seat at my left, where the light of the comet can fall on you and where I can see you plainly. Mr. Crow, will you be the first?"

Mr. Crow stepped up to the judgment-seat very confidently, while the Wizard put on his spectacles and turned the lamp so that the light fell full upon the glossy feathers of the large black bird. It was a revolving seat, which the Wizard turned round and round slowly so that he could see all sides of the bird. "A fine bird," he said, very deliber-

ately, as if thinking aloud, "a perfect bird, unless — unless what? — let me see — ah, a slant in the left eye — in *both* eyes — a *very decided* slant — very sly — very cunning — inclined to steal — very *much* inclined to steal — a THIEF, in fact; steals Mr. Farmer's corn and peas — especially in the early morning when nobody is around — a *very bad* fault — one of the worst. I am quite sure, Mr. Crow, that Springtime would not choose you for his herald, — he could not trust you. That will do. Mr. Parrot!"

Mr. Parrot walked up very sedately and took his place on the judgment-seat. The Wizard gazed at him gravely and stroked his back. "Fine feathers — green, red, yellow, — fine feathers, — rather small head — large tongue — large tongue, small head — talks more than he thinks — talks *very much* more than he thinks — talks often *without* thinking — says what he hears others say. Tongue rather harsh, too — and blisters at the end — bad words! bad words! I am sorry to say, Mr. Parrot, that I cannot recommend you as herald. People would not be glad to see you year after year. That will do. Mr. Blue Jay!"

The blue jay stepped up very jauntily and took the seat.

The Wizard looked at him admiringly, for he was clad in a beautiful tailor-made suit that fitted him to perfection. "A handsome bird," he said, "a handsome bird, — that is, handsome clothes. Eye very good, too — a little slant, a little slant — but on the whole a good eye. Let me see, what is this on the back of the head? — these long feathers —? oh, a crest! I see. Just for decoration. A vain bird, vain as a peacock — and like all vain people hard to get along with — and very unfriendly — likes to flock alone — other folks not quite good enough. I regret to inform you, Mr. Blue Jay, that Springtime would not desire you as his herald. That will do. Mr. Robin!"

The robin hopped up on the seat in his fine dress suit and red shirt-front, his chest inflated and his eyes shining. The Wizard looked at him intently for some time, then he began, "You are the Bishop's friend, you say. Let me see — a bright red spot on your bill — the Bishop's cherries, I should say — but we'll let that pass. Eye very suspicious — *very* suspicious — trusts nobody — always

looking, even among your best friends, to see if somebody isn't going to harm you — cannot pull a worm out of the Bishop's garden without looking around suspiciously all the time. A very unhappy frame of mind to be in — unhappy for you — unhappy for others. You would hardly do for the herald. That will do. Mr. English Sparrow!"

The English sparrow fluttered up noisily and took his place. "You say," began the Wizard, "that you have not the faults of the other birds."

"Yes," said the sparrow, talking very fast, "I am not as mean as that black thief, and I don't talk such nonsense as old Polly, and I'm not so stuck up as the jay, and I am not suspicious like the Bishop's friend. I haven't any of the faults of the other birds."

The Wizard pushed his spectacles up on his brow, turned the light away, and looked at him. "I see," he said, "I do not need the comet light at all. I could see you in the dark. Sharp bill — sharp tongue — sharp claws — in a continual state of bad temper — very quarrelsome — very unpleasant neighbor; in fact, a common nuisance. That will do. Mr. Bluebird!"

"I am sure, Mr. Owl," said the bluebird, rising, "that I need not take your time. I am not the bird to be chosen, for I know that I am far from being a perfect bird. I have many faults. There are many nobler birds than I from whom Springtime may choose his herald."

But the Wizard was quite insistent that the bluebird should come forward where he could read his fortune.

"You say that you have many faults," remarked the Owl. "That may be, but I see by the light of the comet that they are small, very faint indeed. Besides, the ability to see one's faults and the desire to correct them is the greatest of virtues. There may be better birds, but I am frank to say that I am not acquainted with them. I have no hesitation, Mr. Bluebird, in saying that it is my judgment that you should be the herald of the Spring, for, if you will permit me to say it, it seems that you are

*'Both handsome and happy, gifted and good,
And as modest as modest can be.'*"

whereat Mr. Bluebird blushed painfully, while in his heart he was very happy.

Springtime agreed with Mr. Owl, and posted notices on every tree by the water's edge that Mr. Bluebird should henceforth be his herald, the first bird of the spring.

"There is one now on the branch of that old tree," said the Wise-and-Wonder-Man. "He is carrying the colors and playing the fife."

"What is he saying?" asked Query.

"Well," said the Wise-and-Wonder-Man, "it always sounds to me as if he were saying, 'Pur-i-ty, pur-i-ty,' but I asked him one day and he said it was only, 'Spring-is-here, spring-is-here.'"

*The City that Never was
Reached*

The City that Never was Reached



LUNCH was over and Ernest and his mother sat by the library table, reading, as they were accustomed to do each afternoon. Sometimes Ernest read from his book while his mother read from hers. Sometimes she read to him from his book while he listened with big eyes, and sometimes he asked her to read to him from *her* book, for even if he could not understand it all he loved the sound of the big words, and the swing of the poetry. Both had been reading quietly for some time this afternoon when Ernest looked up and rubbed his eyes.

“Mother, read to me out of your book, won’t you, please?”

“I am afraid you will not understand it, my son; it is rather difficult.”

"Oh, yes, I will, mother."

So she read aloud:

"A city throned upon the height behold,
Wherein no foot of man as yet has trod;
The City of Man's Life fulfilled in God.
Bathed all in light, with open gates of gold,
Perfect the City is in tower and street;
And there a palace for each mortal waits,
Complete and perfect, at whose outer gates
An angel stands its occupant to greet."

"What city is that, mother?"

"The City of Life, my son."

"Have you ever been there, mother?"

"No, my boy."

"Why not?"

"I have never been able to find the way."

"Have you tried to find it?"

"Yes, my boy, I think I have."

"Has father ever been there?"

"No, not all the way to the City."

"Has he tried to find the way?"

"Yes, I know he has tried hard to find it."

"Is it very far away, mother?"

"Yes, my son, it is a long way to the City."

"Which road do you take?"

"They say it is a very straight road, but just where it is, it is hard to tell."

"Do you think I can ever reach the City?"

"I hope so; there is nothing that I hope for so much in all the world."

"Could I start today? Or am I too little?"

"No, one is never too young. You may start any day."

Just then the door-bell rang, and she could not stay to explain to Ernest what she meant by saying that he could start today. She became so busily engaged with her caller that she did not notice that the boy put on his coat and cap with great care and started out.

He did not know just where to go. The City was a long way, his mother had said, and the road was straight. So the way must be the long street that ran through the center of the town, which he had heard folks say ran out ever and ever so far. At any rate that seemed most likely.

On and on he walked between the rows of houses. He began to read the street signs, for surely he would soon find one that said: TO THE CITY OF LIFE. But he found no such sign.

Here were some boys; they would know the way to the City, for boys know all the streets.

"What is the way to the City of Life?" he inquired rather uncertainly of them as they came tearing along the street. But they never stopped. One or two of them looked at him curiously over the shoulder to see who it was who had spoken, but that was all.

Here was a man coming down the street. He would know, for he looked as if he knew everything.

"Please, sir, can you tell me the way to the City of Life?" asked our young traveler with his hand to his cap.

"To what?" asked the man, as he paused for an instant. Then with a twinkle in his eye as much as to say, "This isn't All Fool's Day, but I have heard boys ask joking questions before," he walked quickly along.

Ernest was almost discouraged. Why did the man smile like that? Did he misunderstand him? Perhaps he didn't like boys.

Well, here was an old man, he would be kind and would surely know the way. So Ernest stepped up before him with his cap in his hand, made his politest bow and ventured again to ask:

"Please, sir, can you tell me the way to the City of Life?"

"To wh-a-t?" asked the old man slowly as he looked earnestly into the face of the boy.

"To the City of Life. I'm trying to find it. Mother says it's a long way, and I've come a long way now, so I must be near the City. Can you tell me the way?"

"No, my boy, I cannot," said the old man seriously.

"Have you never been there?"

"No, never," replied the old man.

"Why not?"

"Well, somehow I have never been able to find the way."

"Have you tried?"

"Yes, some."

"Do you think the City is near here?" asked Ernest eagerly.

"I am afraid it is quite a journey farther, my boy, though I have heard some say that it is not so very far away."

"Do you think I can find the way?"

"I hope so, my boy; I think you can if you look long enough."

He was about to explain what he meant, when Ernest, with a quick "Thank you," turned and resumed his journey down the long street. He walked and walked and walked

until the houses began to grow fewer and the lawns bigger and greener. He was almost ready to turn back and give up his search when the street brought him to a little hill, on top of which was the biggest house that he had ever seen. It was surrounded with trees, and in front of it was the greenest of lawns dotted with the gayest of flowers. But perhaps it wasn't a house after all; perhaps it was the City; it looked like it to Ernest. The City was on a hill, his mother had read that. "Bathed all in light," — yes, the beautiful white building fairly glistened in the sunlight. "With open gates of gold" — he remembered that, too; and here were gates, sure enough, right before him, shining and yellow like gold, and they were open. And there was somebody at the gates, too, in fine uniform — maybe he was the angel whom his mother had read about, who was there to greet all who came. There were towers, — and a beautiful street, — and — *everything*. Yes, Ernest was sure that he had reached the City of Life at last. How happy his mother would be that he had found it! He would go in and look around and then he would go home and tell her all about it. But his legs

were so tired that he would lie down just a minute here under a great tree not far from the gate, and rest a little.

Then a marvelous thing happened. In just a moment he was completely rested and got up. Everything had changed. Instead of that hill which he was going to climb, there was a beautiful level street, white as silver, and the curbstones were yellow gold. The street was full of people and Ernest found himself among them, running swiftly and never growing tired or out of breath. How long he ran he did not know, when he found himself on a long white platform that stretched away as far as his eye could see, to the right and the left. Beside this platform were miles and miles of the most beautiful track he had ever imagined, its shining rails laid in beds of flowers. And there was a guide-board there with a gleaming hand upon it, pointing to the words: TO THE CITY OF LIFE.

Ernest looked around; he was all alone. What was he to do? At just that moment a noble man appeared, in spotless uniform of white, and upon his cap were the words: KEEPER OF THE TRACK AND GUIDE TO THE

CITY OF LIFE. Ernest, with his cap in his hand, stepped up to him without the least bit of fear, for his face was kind.

"Please, sir," he said, "how can I get to the City?"

"Why, take the train," said the Guide.

"When does one come?" asked the boy.

"Oh, in a moment; trains are always coming."

"But who will stop it? I see no station."

"*You* must stop it. Every passenger stops the train for himself. Did you never hear that? All you have to do is to wave your hand, — like this, — and the train will stop."

At that moment a great train appeared with many cars. What wonderful cars they were! They had silver sides, and roofs of blue, and windows that sparkled like diamonds. Ernest waved his hand the way the Guide had shown him and, sure enough, the train stopped and the boy got aboard.

Ernest was lost in wonder at the beauty of the car, which was as magnificent inside as it was outside, — gold and silver and blue, blue and silver and gold. And what a lot of people there were on the train! All kinds of people! There was every kind of folk that Ernest had

ever seen, every kind of strange people that he had ever seen, even in pictures. There were rich and poor, high and low, — Ernest could tell by their clothes. And that was the only way that he knew, for everybody on board this train seemed friend to everybody else. Each passenger had a whole seat to himself, and yet it did not seem to trouble him to share his seat with others. In fact, each seemed happier if he could share his seat with some one else.

The train whirled along at full speed. Ernest was so interested in everything he saw that he scarcely had a thought of where he was going or what he was doing until he saw the conductor coming slowly down the aisle. The strange thing about this conductor was that he did not seem to be punching any tickets or taking any money. Ernest could not understand this. Perhaps they had all paid. And, yet, this could scarcely be, for there were surely some who had come aboard since the train stopped for him. Yet the conductor took no money even from these. Instead, he paused a moment as he came to them, looked at them earnestly and kindly, and passed by. It was all a very mysterious

proceeding. They must, thought Ernest, have made some arrangement with the conductor before they came aboard so that they did not need to pay anything here. But *he* had made no such arrangement. What should he do? He had only five cents in his pocket, which his father had given to him that morning for spending-money. He was afraid that would not be money enough to carry him to the City, and yet he remembered that once he had ridden ever so far on the trolley-car for five cents. At any rate it was all he had.

As the conductor came slowly up to the seat where Ernest sat, the young traveler timidly held out his five-cent piece.

"What is that for?" asked the conductor.

"My fare," replied Ernest.

The conductor shook his head.

"That is not enough," said he.

"But it is all I have," said Ernest. "My father has a lot of money at home and I know he will pay you if you let me stay."

"Your father has not money enough, my boy, to pay your fare on this train."

"But I want so much to go to the City!" pleaded Ernest. "Won't you please let me go, conductor? I'll be very good."

"Then of course you may go," replied the conductor. "One doesn't pay with money upon this train. It is what you are that pays, and you travel as far as you can pay. Don't you hear what the car wheels are saying?"

"I hear the wheels," said Ernest, "but I do not hear them saying anything unless it is: 'Hurry — hurry — hurry — hurry.'"

"Then listen again, sharply."

Ernest listened and sure enough they were saying something. He could understand a word now and then. Pretty soon he heard it all. It was a rhyme or a song, and it ran like this:

*"Hurry, hurry, hurry, hasten
Toward the City that stands on high.
Faster, faster, ever faster,
Round and round the car wheels fly.
Car fare, car fare, pay your car fare,
If you'd reach the City wall;
What your heart is, is the car fare,
What your heart is, — that is all."*

Then Ernest understood. He knew now why the conductor had not punched any tickets or asked for any money. And he knew why the train had stopped now and then and some had got off, and why others had stayed on board. He fell to wondering

how long the conductor would allow him to stay. Should he reach the City? He began to look out of the window anxiously. At length some beautiful buildings flashed by the window and Ernest was quite sure that they were drawing near to the City.

At just that minute there came a fearful shock. The train must have struck something! The roof of the car crashed down and the sides of the car crashed in, the glass crashed, the timbers crashed, everything crashed. Ernest threw his arms out wildly, threw them around a great timber that seemed to be coming down on top of him — and then he opened his eyes, — and *it wasn't timber at all*, but a policeman's neck, and the policeman looked like the man whom he had seen standing by the great gate, and who he thought might be an angel.

"Well," said the policeman, "what's the matter?"

"I don't know," replied Ernest with confusion. "I think there has been an accident."

"And *I* think you have been asleep," said the policeman. "Where do you live? And what is your name?" And a great many more questions he asked.

It was not long before Ernest was home again, and in the arms of a very happy mother, who had begun to fear that something dreadful had happened to him.

As she tucked him into bed that night she explained to him that he must never, never go so far alone until he became much bigger. She told him, too, that the City of Life was not made of houses like the one in which they lived, and that the streets that lead to it are not the out-door streets that we walk on. Ernest lay quiet and thoughtful for a moment, then looked up and said:

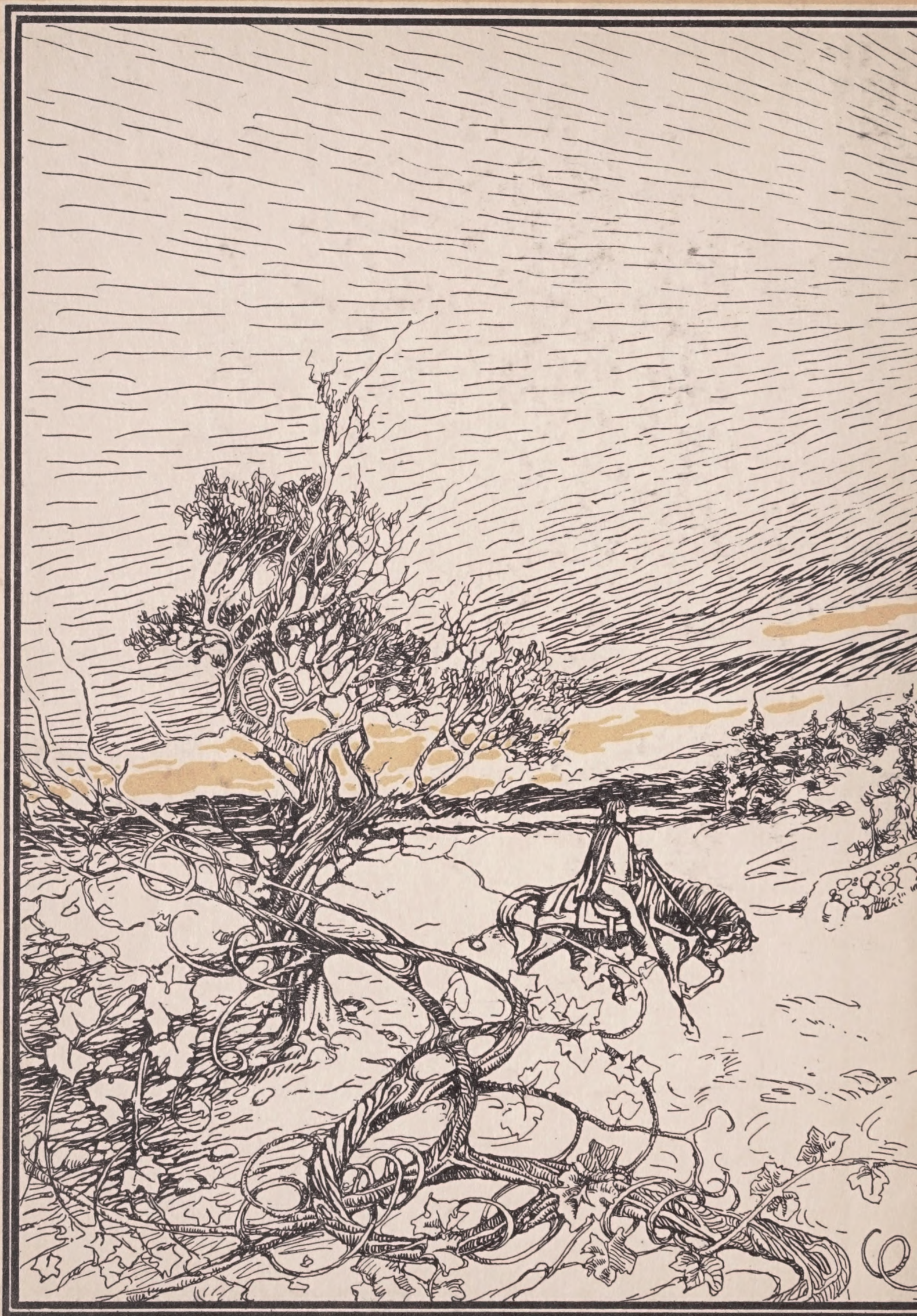
“I am very sorry that the train was wrecked before we reached the City. Do you think I shall *ever* reach the City?”

“I hope so, my son, with all my heart. If you remember and do what the train said, I am quite sure you will:

‘Car fare, car fare, pay your car fare,
If you’d reach the City wall.
What your heart is, is the car fare,
What your heart is, — that is all.’”

Then Ernest fell asleep and dreamed again; but what he dreamed I shall have to tell you some other time.

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